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THE SPECTATOR

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Jacob Heilbrunn on a lethal war of words

*Andrew J. Bacevich on Trump's
weakness for generals*

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Corbyn's fallen idols

Jeremy Corbyn finally broke his silence on Venezuela this week, but in the manner of a man who has his head buried in a very large bucket of sand. He condemned violence 'on both sides', painting the country's problems as a battle between factions rather than a case of a repressive government snuffing out popular protests. No one would know from the Labour leader's words that President Maduro's regime is engaged in what the UN Human Rights Office described this week as a 'widespread and systematic use of excessive force'.

More revealing still was Corbyn's reply when prodded on the economic and social conditions which led to the protests. The economy needed to diversify away from oil, he suggested, adding: 'but we also have to recognise that there have been effective and serious attempts at reducing poverty, improving literacy and improving the lives of the poorest people'. It is hard to believe that he was speaking about a country where, according to the IMF, the economy shrank last year by 8 per cent, inflation hit 481 per cent, unemployment was 17 per cent, and where malnutrition is now widespread. Jeremy Corbyn has become a latter-day Walter Duranty, the *New York Times* reporter who in 1932 won the Pulitzer Prize for a series of glowing reports from Stalin's Soviet Union which turned a blind eye to its manufactured famine.

It is impossible to embark on a fair discussion about Venezuela's problems without acknowledging the disastrous economic experiment to which the country has been subjected under the leadership of the late Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicolas Maduro. The economic problems did not begin when Chavez was elected president in 1999; the country had already declined since 1970, when it had a higher income per

capita than Spain and was among the world's ten richest countries. But Chavez put it on a highly destructive course. He used its vast oil wealth to subsidise food and other hand-outs to the poor, undermining native agriculture and other industries. Price controls destroyed markets, removing incentives to do business. Venezuela's economy was not destroyed by a low oil price — the national oil company had already been run into the ground thanks to Chavez handing it over to be run by his cronies. Following Chavez's death in 2013, Maduro compounded the error by trying to print his way out of economic crisis, fuelling the hyperinflation which has now caused such misery.

The demand that Corbyn condemn Maduro, and the legacy of Chavez, has been ridiculed by some on the left. Why should

*It was the late Hugo Chavez
who put Venezuela on its
highly destructive course*

he speak out about a little local difficulty in Venezuela, they assert, when Theresa May hasn't bothered herself to attack Saudi Arabia's human rights record? But that is to confuse the sometimes ugly demands of realpolitik — where prime ministers have to build relations with countries which don't live up to western standards of democracy — with the fawning tributes which Corbyn has repeatedly paid to Chavez and his successor.

It wasn't the interests of the nation which drove Corbyn to attend a vigil for Hugo Chavez in 2013 and praise him for providing 'inspiration to all of us fighting back against neoliberalism and austerity in Europe and showing us there is a better way of doing things. It's called socialism, it's called social justice and it's something that Venezuela has made a big step towards.' Corbyn was swept

along by Chavez and Maduro out of naive ideology. He has never outgrown student politics, with its need for heroes and pin-up revolutionaries.

When a British political leader has bestowed such warm words on an overseas regime which is rotten to the core, there is an imperative to recant when the truth finally dawns. That Corbyn cannot bring himself to do so indicates what kind of politician he is: one who is all but devoid of pragmatism. Of course, there have been Labour figures in the past who came in from the far left to become moderate politicians. Alistair Darling, once described by Neil Kinnock as a 'bearded Trot' whom he never wanted to see become an MP, is remembered now as the rather dull but generally sensible chancellor of the exchequer who managed the economy through the banking collapse. But there is little sign that Jeremy Corbyn could ever make such a transition to the mainstream. His instinct is always to cling to socialism, whatever the evidence of its failures.

It takes some imagination to see Britain collapsing like Venezuela. Our parliamentary system, our tradition of free and open debate, would surely be strong enough to provide ample opposition if a British Chavez tried to take the country on a ruinous path. Yet Corbyn's refusal to denounce Maduro even now, when left-wing leaders around the world have done so, does not inspire confidence that a government led by him would be a benign experience. If his policies did start to shrink the economy, what would it take for him to appreciate what he was doing?

The prospect of a Corbyn government has receded a little since the immediate aftermath of the general election, yet it remains a genuine possibility. His continued efforts to lionise Venezuelan socialism should not be forgotten.



Classical music's saviour? p36



Your new role model, p16



Sheep may safely graze, p26

THE WEEK

- 3 **Leading article**
- 6 **Portrait of the Week**
- 7 **Diary** A perfect holiday, the problem with 'partner' and that Diana doc
Mark Mason
- 12 **Rod Liddle** Football's 'somewheres'
- 20 **Barometer** Fallen idols, plastic bags and the world's most dangerous trip
- 21 **Ancient and modern** Trump's empire
- 17 **James Delingpole** Let Dave chillax
- 18 **Lara Prendergast** Instasnobbery
- 22 **Letters** Uncivilised air travel, electric car woes and playing gender politics
- 23 **Any other business** Exchange rate pains and the £200 million footballer
Martin Vander Weyer
- 8 **Going nuclear**
Donald Trump vs Kim Jong-un
Jacob Heilbrunn
- 11 **General rule**
Why Trump loves a military man
Andrew J. Bacevich
- 13 **Iraq's forgotten genocide**
How Isis targeted the Yazidis
Tom Holland
- 14 **How I write**
The secret lives of best-selling authors
Irvine Welsh, Susan Hill, Geoff Dyer, Kamila Shamsie, Nicola Barker, Adam Nicolson, Michael Moorcock, Gary Shteyngart
- 16 **The joy of sex**
Stop confusing chastity with decency
Julie Burchill
- 20 **A tale of two Valleys**
It's tech workers vs everyone else
Jamie Bartlett

Charles Moore, James Forsyth and Deborah Ross are away.

BOOKS & ARTS

BOOKS

- 24 **Philip Hensher**
Gainsborough, by James Hamilton
- 26 **Brian Martin**
Modern Gods, by Nick Laird
Dominic Green
The Last Wolf, by Robert Winder
- 27 **Allan Mallinson**
African Kaiser, by Robert Gaudi
- 29 **Jane Ridley**
Miss Muriel Matters, by Robert Wainwright
Roy Kelly
'Japanese Drawing': a poem
- 30 **Tibor Fischer**
Levitation, by Peter Adey
- 31 **Nigel Jones**
on the Third Reich
- 32 **Sarah Crompton**
Get Me the Urgent Biscuits, by Sweetpea Slight
- 33 **Kate Webb**
A State of Freedom, by Neel Mukherjee
Les Murray
'Stuart Devlin's Sculpture': a poem

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Editor: Fraser Nelson



A forgotten genocide, p13



Gainsborough's dark materials, p24



Pure ecstasy, p35

LIFE

ARTS

- 35 **Arthur House**
Thirty years ago, Britain gave the world acid house
- 36 **Profile**
Berlin's new maestro
Norman Lebrecht
- 38 **Museums**
The Natural History Museum's facelift
Melanie McDonagh
- 39 **Proms**
The problem of early music
Alexandra Coghlan
- 40 **The listener**
Mick Jagger's latest release
Rod Liddle
- Radio**
Kate Chisholm
- 41 **Edinburgh**
Fringe round-up
Lloyd Evans
- 42 **Opera**
Greek; Die Walküre
Richard Bratby

LIFE

- 47 **High life** *Taki*
Low life *Jeremy Clarke*
- 48 **Tim Liardet**
'For the Vanishing Twin': a poem
Real life *Melissa Kite*
- 49 **Bridge** *Susanna Gross*
- AND FINALLY . . .**
- 44 **Notes on...** Watercolour
Claudia Massie
- 50 **Chess** *Raymond Keene*
Competition *Lucy Vickery*
- 51 **Crossword** *Pabulum*
- 52 **Status anxiety** *Toby Young*
Battle for Britain *Michael Heath*
- 53 **The Wiki Man** *Rory Sutherland*
Your problems solved
Mary Killen
- 54 **Drink** *Bruce Anderson*
Mind your language
Dot Wordsworth

Whenever I pompously declare:
'I'm at my desk every morning by
7 a.m.' a cynical voice in my head
screams: 'You wish!'

Irvine Welsh, p14

Nothing becomes the builder
boyfriend so much as the manner
of his leaving

Melissa Kite, p48

Before 1988, a night out had been
about what you wore and who you
ended up punching. Acid house
changed this forever, reorienting
leisure around music

Arthur House, p35

CONTRIBUTORS

Mark Mason, whose diary is on p7, is the author of *The Importance of Being Trivial*, and used to make radio programmes for the BBC. He talks about staycations on this week's *Spectator* podcast.

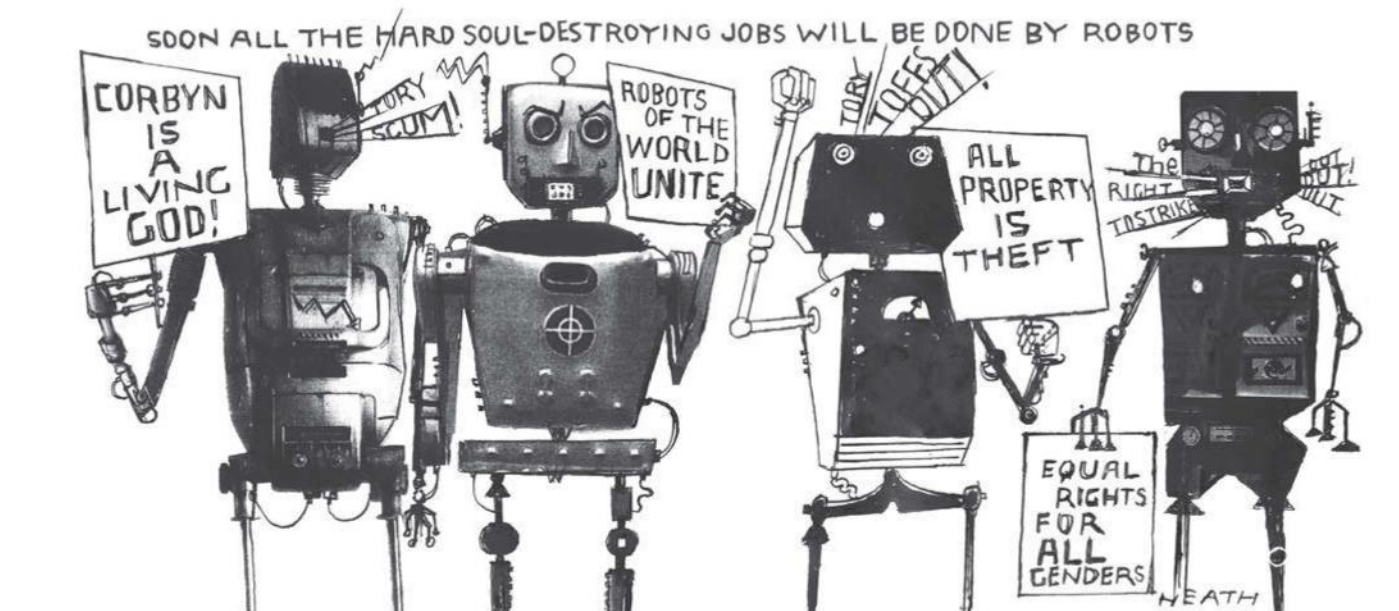
Andrew J. Bacevich is a historian and a retired officer of the US army. He writes about Trump's generals on p11.

Jane Ridley won the Duff Cooper Prize for *The Architect and his Wife*, a biography of her great-grandfather Edwin Lutyns. She writes about suffragists on p29.

Nigel Jones is the author of books on Oswald Mosley and Rupert Brooke, among others. On p31 he reviews two startling new histories of Nazi Germany.

Sarah Crompton is a freelance journalist, formerly the arts editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. She visits 'theatreland' on p32.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

British negotiators are prepared to pay up to £36 billion to the EU to settle the so-called divorce bill for Brexit, according to the *Sunday Telegraph*. By voting for Brexit, 'the old have comprehensively shafted the young', the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Sir Vince Cable, aged 74, wrote in the *Mail on Sunday*, 'imposing a world view coloured by nostalgia for an imperial past on a younger generation much more comfortable with modern Europe.' Lord Neuberger, who will retire as president of the Supreme Court next month, said that the government should 'express clearly what the judges should do about decisions of the European Court of Justice after Brexit.' Ten platforms at Waterloo station in London, which deals with 272,000 journeys daily, were closed until 28 August for extension works costing £800 million. In a jocular reference to the worst admitted crime of Theresa May, the Prime Minister, of running through a field of wheat, Ruth Davidson, the Conservative leader in Scotland, was photographed running through a field of barley. The *Federal Cedar* prepared to sail from Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, with 34,564 tons of barley, more than 10 per cent of the British crop, bound for drought-stricken southern Spain.

Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the opposition, after being challenged to condemn the Maduro regime in Venezuela, said: 'The people who have died, either those on the streets or security forces that have been attacked by people on the street — all of those lives are terrible for the loss

of them.' Cars and a derelict building in Belfast were set on fire by rioters reacting to the confiscation of material for bonfires to mark the anniversary of internment on 9 August 1971. Nadeem Muhammad, aged 43, was found guilty in Manchester of trying to smuggle a pipe bomb on to a plane to Bergamo in January. The government appointed Professor Dieter Helm of New College, Oxford, to produce an independent review of energy prices by October. The barred grass snake, *Natrix helvetica*, was declared a different species from the common grass snake, *Natrix natrix*, bringing to four the species of snake found in Britain. Tesco abandoned the 5p plastic bag in favour of a 10p 'bag for life'.

At Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, donated to it by the late R.W. Ketton-Cremer, who it insisted was homosexual, the National Trust told volunteers to wear rainbow badges on pain of being hidden from sight; after a small rebellion and much publicity, the Trust relented. Robert Hardy, the actor, died aged 92. David Cameron, the former prime minister, was photographed holding a lighted cigarette.

Abroad

Because of North Korea's continuing missile tests, the United Nations Security Council unanimously agreed new sanctions against it, meant to prevent a third of its \$3 million-worth exports of coal and other goods. In a thoughtful leader, the state-run North Korean daily *Rodong Sinmun* said that if America wasn't careful it would be 'catapulted

into an unimaginable sea of fire'. North Korea made threatening noises about the American territory of Guam. President Donald Trump of the United States broke off a 17-day holiday at his golf club at Bedminster, New Jersey, to say that North Korea would be met by 'fire, fury and, frankly, power the likes of which this world has never seen before'. The Kremlin provided photographs of President Vladimir Putin fishing with no shirt on in the Tuva area of southern Siberia.

A day after being sworn in, the Venezuelan constituent assembly sacked the country's chief prosecutor, Luisa Ortega; the assembly also decided to extend its session in power from six months to two years. At his swearing-in ceremony for a second term, President Hassan Rouhani warned President Trump that he ran the risk of political suicide if he scrapped America's nuclear agreement with Iran. Google sacked an employee, James Damore, for 'advancing harmful gender stereotypes in our workplace'; he had written a memo suggesting that 'the abilities of men and women differ in part due to biological causes'.

An Iraqi court sentenced 27 men to be hanged for their part in the massacre of 1,700 soldiers by the Islamic State at the former US base of Camp Speicher, near Tikrit, in 2014. Glen Campbell, the country singer, died aged 81. Italian police questioned 15 volunteer firemen in southern Sicily accused of starting fires in order to get paid to put them out.

CSH

DIARY

Mark Mason



No sympathy from me for the Brits stuck in the European heatwave. I've never understood people who go abroad for their holidays at this time of year. OK, as this week shows, you're not absolutely nailed on for sunshine back home. But it's probably going to be at least pleasant, and certainly won't tip over into the furnace-like conditions of Italy and Greece. Even France gets too hot. Why not stay and explore all those places in Britain you keep meaning to visit, and take your foreign sun in January, when you really need it? If funds or holiday allowance permit only one trip per year, copy the family I heard of whose summer break entailed getting out their passports, leaving them by the back door and walking into the garden where their sun-loungers awaited. The symbolism is all you need. No expense, no four-hour wait at the airport, no peeling yourself off the sweat-soaked bedsheets.

I'm also delighted to report a new member of the 'Venice is crap' club. My friend Jane, just back, says that even without the heat and mosquitoes she wouldn't have liked the place: it's too pretty-pretty. I used to worry that my dislike of the city was simply me being an uncultured oik, but John Pearson (biographer of everyone from Ian Fleming to the Krays, and as cultured as they come) tells me he agrees. Venice isn't a real place: hardly anyone lives there now, and those that do are only there to cater for tourists. It's a theme park, not a city. If Disney were going to do Venice, they would do Venice.

Robert Hardy, whose Siegfried Farnon in *All Creatures Great and Small* was a highlight of my childhood Sunday evenings. (In one of those coincidences novelists would never dare use, Farnon and Basil Fawlty were both based on someone called Donald Sinclair — different Donald Sinclairs.) The radio and TV tributes to Hardy included several uses of 'thee-air-ter'. This is how today's luvvies pronounce 'theatre'. It used to be 'theerter', but in recent years the middle syllable has become more and more elongated. One of those snobbish affectations people copy purely to show they're in the know. Watch Michael Caine from 30 years ago: he said 'theerter'. Now his 'a-i-i-i-r'

goes on for months. How did it start? My money's on Michael Gambon and one of his legendary wind-ups.

While we're on language: please can we have a new word for 'partner'? As in someone you live with but aren't married to. There's (in my case) 'common-law wife', but that sounds demeaning. 'Partner' itself could mean business partner. 'Other half' is dated, 'significant other' was only ever a joke, and 'girlfriend' is absurd when we're both in our 40s and have an eight-year-old

child. Acronyms (off the top of my head: 'POMO', 'Parent Of My Offspring') are always gimmicky. Solutions, please. And don't say 'get married'.

Sunday's Diana doc on Channel 4 pulled the usual tricks to get nearly two hours of screen time out of not very much material: moody tracking shots, interviewees wandering around looking thoughtful, yards of archive soaked in dramatic music. You can do that on TV. On radio it's different. I was working at the BBC when Diana died, and a few of us radio researchers spent the week before the funeral digging out material for the commentary. One of my topics was Diana's interest in alternative medicine, and I stumbled across the stats for her colonic irrigation (12 gallons, thrice weekly). If in doubt include it, so I did, thinking the commentator would only be dipping into the notes. But on the day there was so much time to fill he had to read everything out verbatim. Listening at home I held my breath as he got to the colonic irrigation bit. There was a short pause — obviously he was reading it to himself — then he moved straight on to the next fact. Even in that incredible week, there were some areas where Auntie feared to tread.

Moeen Ali and Hashim Amla were spotted having dinner together during the final Test match at Old Trafford. I've spent the entire series yearning for them to form the world's first Muslim ZZ Top tribute band, so can only hope this was the first planning meeting. Even if it wasn't, we can still relish the fact that Moeen's triumph in the previous match was England's first ever bearded Test hat-trick.

Final low-cost tip for your staycation: jigsaws. I was given one last year as a present, and have taken to them like a Mitford to Hitler. They're a pleasing cross between logical deduction and artistic creativity. You'll be in good company: the Queen is a fan, though to save money she gets hers from a jigsaw library. The first one ever (1760) was a map of the world designed as a geographical teaching aid. Why not bring out a modern version? Once it's done you can use it to choose where you'll go on holiday next winter.



Going nuclear

Trump's increasingly dangerous war of words with Pyongyang

JACOB HEILBRUNN



Wednesday marked the 72nd anniversary of the dropping of the bomb on Nagasaki. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki prompted Emperor Hirohito to announce Japan's surrender in a radio address, though fanatical war hawks tried to stop him. After 1945, Japan developed a pacifist movement and a so-called peace constitution. No country has deployed these fearsome weapons since.

Can it really be a coincidence that the day before this eerie anniversary, Donald Trump issued his implicit threat to unleash an unprecedentedly devastating nuclear attack on North Korea that would apparently eclipse Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

'North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States,' said the President. 'They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.' Trump did not use the word 'nuclear', but his words curiously echoed those Harry Truman's statement after the first atomic bomb was dropped. 'It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe,' said Truman. 'Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such numbers and power as they have not yet seen.'

Nuclear weapons are the great taboo — or at least they have been since the second

world war. Neither the Soviet Union nor China has ever used them in combat; nor have India or Pakistan. With Trump and Kim Jong-un, a bad hombre if ever there was one, now at loggerheads with each other, is that about to change?

Trump's entourage says no. The old man, we are told, was in a lousy mood. Maybe he had a bad day on the links at Bedminster,

*Maybe Trump had had
a bad day on the links
at Bedminster*

where he issued his warning during a photo op at the Trump National Golf Club. Trump likes to generate world-shaking news while promoting his brand, and perhaps the 'fire, fury and, frankly, power' that he threatened to unleash on Pyongyang really was meant for his 7-iron.

The reaction in Washington, from both Republicans and Democrats, has not been favourable. Senator John McCain said, 'I take exception to the President's comments, because you've got to be sure that you can do what you say you're going to do.' Trump's defenders pointed out that if John McCain had won his bid for the presiden-

cy in 2008, America would probably have ended up in a war with Russia over Georgia, since McCain's international outlook is fundamentally more hawkish than the current President's.

Still, plenty of other conservative institutions are concerned that Trump's bellicosity towards North Korea is not backed up by coherent thinking or strategy. The Heritage Foundation, the citadel of conservatism in Washington, has suggested that Trump should employ more restrained language. And Democratic Senator Ben Cardin, who serves on the Foreign Relations Committee, notes that Trump's flamboyant rhetoric sounds much like the kind of fulgurations that routinely emanate from Pyongyang.

Maybe Trump can successfully deploy what's known as the 'madman' theory of international relations, in which a foreign adversary is supposed to believe that the US President is so bonkers that it's best to come to terms. But what if Trump really is a madman? What if he really means it when he says that he's ready to rain down 'fire and fury' upon North Korea, or at least convinces himself that it's a neat idea?

The problem with Trump's remarks is that unless he really is preparing to back up his red line, then he is debasing the credibility of

America's nuclear forces. The great deterrent could stop deterring. Far from being cowed by Trump's remarks, North Korea is talking about creating an 'enveloping fire' around American forces based in Guam. It's likely to conduct another ICBM test this weekend. Kim Jong-un's message is clear: anything crazy you can do, I can do crazier. Indeed, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency, North Korea has up to 60 nuclear bombs and can miniaturise a warhead. There is no beautiful wall that can be built to fence off America from North Korea.

Trump might be bluffing, but North Korea could take his cavalier statements seriously and strike first. Either way, at a moment when even Washington's neocon hawks are counselling caution, it's hard not to have a bad case of the collywobles when it comes to the prospect of the irascible and volatile Trump trying to stare down the pariah of Pyongyang. Trump's tweet on Wednesday, in which he said that 'hopefully' America will never use its nuclear power, scarcely offered reassurance.

Could Kim Jong-un be bluffing, too? The Supreme Leader is an even more ridiculous figure than the President — less powerful but more unhinged. Both he and Trump may simply be peacocking with their military might in order to make themselves look and feel strong. North Korea has long been a bogeyman in the east; but if it were really an 'existential threat' or a 'regional psychopath', as we've so often been told, surely it would have caused another war by now? So far at least, however, the antipathy between the West and Pyongyang never amounts to much beyond dramatic threats and ominous weapons tests. Perhaps North Korea and Team Trump both understand that the great power game is as much about theatre as action. Kim and Trump can beat their chests at each other but war does not have to follow.

Another possibility is that Trump's sabre-rattling towards North Korea is less his juvenile machismo, more the doing of the so-called 'grown-ups' in the Trump administration. When National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster joined the White House in February, replacing the wildly irresponsible Mike Flynn, the foreign-policy establishment expressed relief. Here at least was a man of substance at the heart of America's strategic thinking, an antidote to the attention-deficient Commander-in-Chief. But McMaster is a general, and military men tend to think of military solutions. It was soon after McMaster entered the White House that Trump began ratcheting up his rhetoric towards North Korea. The idea then was clearly to pressure China. 'If China is not going to solve North Korea,' Trump said in early April. 'We will.'

Days after that threat, Trump dropped the MOAB ('Mother Of All Bombs') on Isis tunnel networks in Afghanistan, an anti-terror strike that also seemed perfectly designed to show Beijing and Pyongyang



'Your mother says you've been watching that fire long enough.'

that the new American President was not a man with whom they should trifle. H.R. McMaster's influence within the administration appears to have grown in recent days, following the appointment of another general, John F. Kelly, as White House Chief of Staff. Kelly almost immediately supported the firing of Ezra Cohen-Watnick, a Trump loyalist on the National Security Council — a move that McMaster had long pushed for. It's possible, then, that it is the generals McMaster and Kelly, now at the heart of American executive power, who have convinced the President to be ever more bellicose towards North Korea.

What's certain is that the Trump administration has China, the great rival to American hegemony, in its strategic sights. Communist China's only treaty alliance is with communist North Korea. That's where Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — who all tried to control the dangerous Pyongyang regime — fell short. Any showdown with North Korea would have meant confronting China, and that was not a risk worth taking. The Trump administration is eager to show Beijing that it is more resolute; that for all China's expanding wealth and power, it does not have the final say over what happens even in its sphere of influence.

It is a far more risky approach, given the nuclear stakes involved, but it appears to be working. At the United Nations last weekend, China's delegate voted for increased sanctions on North Korea; and the same day as Trump issued his fire and fury threat,

the foreign minister of the People's Republic confirmed that China was willing to 'pay the price' of fully implementing controls on its troublesome ally. China appears to be listening to the message Trump is sending. Certainly, he had made it clear enough on Twitter. 'I am very disappointed in China,' he tweeted at the end of last month. 'Our foolish past leaders have allowed them to make hundreds of billions of dollars a year in trade, yet they do *nothing* for us with North Korea,

The great nuclear deterrent could stop deterring

just talk. We will no longer allow this to continue. China could easily solve this problem!'

Now, rather than accept that China has done something with its move towards sanctions, Trump has doubled down, going so far as to raise the possibility of nuclear war. If it isn't just bravado, Trump's intention might have been to ensure that China now enforces the sanctions it has supported, instead of reneging on them as it has on previous occasions. Where other leaders might have gratefully accepted an agreement, Trump is twisting China's arm.

It could work, but China is unlikely to support any move that would actually bring about regime change in Pyongyang, since that could mean civil war and a refugee crisis on its border. Have the 'grown-ups' in Washington thought through all the consequences of bringing down Kim Jong-un? Their predecessors never did with Saddam Hussein. Trump's madman approach to foreign policy may bring about quick wins — nobody wants to mess with a leader who might do anything at any point, especially when he has easily the most powerful military of all time at his disposal. But Kim Jong-un is mad, too; or at least he does a better impression of being a lunatic than Donald Trump. If this is a high-stakes game of chicken, who will be first to turn aside? In trying to teach China a lesson, Trump may find himself facing a disaster he cannot control.



'It takes him a while to unwind.'

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Jacob Heilbrunn and Freddy Gray discuss the escalating war of words.

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General rule

Trump hasn't 'drained the swamp' –
he's put the military in charge of it

ANDREW J. BACEVICH

Dwight Eisenhower was right to warn Americans in 1961 of the 'military industrial complex', but perhaps it is now the only thing that stands between the US and chaos. The new White House chief of staff, General John F. Kelly, is the third general Donald Trump has appointed to his cabinet. Kelly is already getting a good press for introducing military discipline and order to the Trump White House. His first move was to fire the attention-grabbing billionaire Anthony Scaramucci as head of communications, and he's said to have told even members of Trump's family that they must book 'face time' with the President through him. Is this another sign that the military men and the grown-ups are taking over, since the rest of Trump's team appear so spectacularly ill-suited to high office?

Eisenhower was a general, not a scholar. Yet his ideas about America's drift towards anti-democratic rule were very much in line with those of the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills, whose 1956 book *The Power Elite* described the architecture of American power as it had evolved during and just after the second world war. His exploration of how things worked in the Age of Eisenhower helps us understand why just about nothing seems to work in the Age of Trump.

Its acid tone ('Blessed are the cynical, for only they have what it takes to succeed') is at least as suited to 2017 as it was to the 1950s. Mills loved to skewer any depictions of post-war America as an exemplar of democracy – he knew that plain folk recognised bunk when they saw it. The people 'feel that they live in a time of big decisions', he wrote. 'They know that they are not making any.' As a result, they were 'without purpose in an epoch in which they are without power'. He might have been describing the convictions that prompted voters to back Trump.

In the 1950s, big decisions were made exclusively by members of what Mills called 'the three domains of power', that is 'the warlords, the corporate chieftains, [and] the political directorate'. This interlocking, self-perpetuating group were 'the power elite of America'. They called the shots, reaped most of the rewards and let others foot the bill. Vowing to 'drain the swamp', Candidate Trump gave the distinct impression that he intended to dismantle this tripartite elite.

With him as their champion, the people rather than the establishment would rule. This implicit promise won votes.

Yet President Trump seems to be following a different course. Rather than dismantling the power elite, he seems intent on preserving it, albeit in modified form. He still has a low regard for the political *apparatus*: the two main parties; Congress; members of the bureaucracy. But senior military officers and successful corporate executives are the kind of people he admires, trusts and leaves to run things while he tends to his Twitter account and flings insults at adversaries, real or imagined.

So contrary to liberal fears, Trump turns out not to be a proto-fascist. He is not going to establish a police state. He evinces

In comparison with the President and his associates, the generals do indeed appear to be the 'adults in the room'

virtually no interest in ideology. Nor does he have any worldview beyond a concern for protecting, or better still embellishing, the Trump brand. Devoid of anything approximating an actual political conviction, Trump is, in an odd sense, almost apolitical.

So a mere half-year into his presidency, we can say with confidence that the swamp Trump ran against will persist and may even flourish. Yet if he has his way, what Mills called the political directorate will be squeezed out and the swamp will be run by generals – Kelly, Defense Secretary James Mattis, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster – and mega-rich one-percenters like Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin, education secre-

tary Betsy DeVos, and commerce secretary Wilbur Ross. The military-industrial complex will look more like a military-billionaire complex, with the generals imposing a sense of order if the rich men squabble too publicly, and blocking any Banana Republicanism if they seek to make themselves and their friends ever richer.

We can count on Tillerson et al to subscribe to Calvin Coolidge's dictum that 'the chief business of the American people is business', no doubt ensuring that business interests are served as long as Trump remains President. What we can expect from the generals is less clear, although Trump's latest bellicose outburst towards North Korea might give us a clue. The generals can also be expected to look after each other: Kelly has already backed McMaster's removal of Ezra Cohen-Watnick, an ally of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, from the National Security Council, on the reported grounds that 'chains of command' must be respected. It was a move that Kushner and Stephen Bannon, the President's chief strategist, had resisted. For now, however, it seems Trump has let the generals take control.

His affinity for the top brass is curious. As a troublesome teenager he was sent to the New York Military Academy – perhaps army men exert over Trump an authority that nobody else can achieve. But if the generals are from Mars, Trump is from Neptune, having kept himself about as far from war and military service as it is possible to get.

Granted, like most senior military officers regardless of nationality, Kelly, Mattis and McMaster exude a certain orderliness and decorum. In comparison with the President himself and associates such as Bannon and Kushner, the generals do indeed appear to be the 'adults in the room'. They also understand what it means to obey.

Yet unlike Trump's billionaires, who did actually make (or inherit) tons of money, none of these generals has done what military leaders are expected to do; namely, to bring a war to a successful conclusion and justify the need for a professional military class in the first place. This is not for want of trying, given the number of wars that the United States has been engaged in over the past couple of decades.

Of course, in the rarified atmosphere where Trump's generals now operate, it's not winning wars that demands their attention. That thankless endeavour they can now leave to lesser colleagues. Instead, the challenge facing Kelly, Mattis and McMaster is to forge a basic approach to domestic and foreign policy that will preclude the advent of yet further wars, while also providing basic national security and, in Kelly's case, a functional government. Given the boss they report to and given the prodding of those in Washington keen to pick a fight with Russia or Iran or North Korea or China, they will have their work cut out.



'Can you comb over a mohican?'

Football wants the 'somewheres' to get lost



Some years ago, when Millwall played West Ham United, the Millwall fans sang the following song (to the tune of 'When The Saints Go Marching In', if you want to hum along): 'Oh east London, is like Bengal. Oh east London is like Bengal. It's like the back streets of Delhi. Oh east London is like Bengal.' They haven't sung it for two or three years, but only because Millwall haven't played West Ham. I mean, I don't think that Millwall's supporters have gradually thought better of it and decided that the ditty was perhaps racist and demeaning, or are worried about the relative geography of Delhi and Bengal.

If we (Millwall are my team) played West Ham tomorrow, I think we'd still sing it. I've watched one or two West Ham fans nodding their heads sadly when the song gets an airing, and there's at least one Hammer writing for this publication who would ruefully concur. West Ham's fans respond, incidentally, by suggesting that Millwall supporters are members of the travelling community — which they do without, to my mind, the requisite respect for that much-maligned ethnic minority. But then we make the same sort of references whenever Millwall play Gillingham: 'You can't read, you can't write, you wear gold and Nikes. You are all from Gillingham and you are fucking pikeys.' Or, more briefly: 'You can shove your lucky heather up your arse.' It is, I would accept, a fairly coarse demotic and not mindful of the very real hurt it might cause. Or perhaps very mindful of that hurt, and revelling in it.

Why do football supporters sing these sorts of songs? The writer David Goodhart might be able to provide an answer. He divides the country between 'somewhere people' and 'anywhere people'. There are those who feel a profound allegiance to their hometown, who are rooted there almost to the degree that it defines them, and those who feel no sort of allegiance, who have escaped the bonds through aspiration, wealth, advanced education or simply a more cosmopolitan mindset. Football supporters are — or were — resolutely in the former group. The point of the Saturday football game is to share with your friends a pride in the area in which you grew up and to which you still belong and which your football team repre-

sents, no matter how useless they might be. And sure, to exhibit a brief and laconic loathing of the area from which your opponents hail. Cotermious with that state of mind is a sense of community, of belonging, of mutual-ity and permanence.

Goodhart does not say much about football, but I think his analysis is nonetheless correct. It is the big division in our country — the somewheres versus the anywheres. I noticed it at a school reunion I attended near Middlesbrough after the Brexit vote. Almost all of those who had remained on Teesside voted leave. Almost all of those who had left voted remain. And this was mediated only slightly by education and affluence.

The sorts of chants I have mentioned have now been outlawed as racist or homophobic or simply vile

The Premier League kicks off this weekend and the sorts of chants I mentioned will not be heard, because they have become somehow illegal. Outlawed because they are perceived to be racist or homophobic or simply vile — because football no longer is what football was, and the 'somewheres' do not really have a stake in it any more. If you were an Arsenal fan and turned up to Wembley for the Charity Shield season-opener against Chelsea you may well have paid £120 for your ticket and sat alongside Bob, an Arsenal fan from Doncaster, and Sven, a Gooner from Malmo. And you will have watched your team — foreigners, all of

them, except for one lad from Manchester and another from Stalybridge — exhorted onwards by the French manager. Who is the employee of an American owner. I suppose you could claim that Arsenal still represented your area because the ground is near Finsbury Park. But it is only there by chance; if a more lucrative deal hove into view further afield, your club would move before you could say 'Woolwich'.

In which case, what is it, exactly, that you are supporting? For many, it is the allure of vicarious success — you support Arsenal because they are 'good'. Or because you think you ought to ally yourself to some team and Arsenal are quite famous, so they'll do. Or because you like to watch 'attractive football', which Arsenal do indeed exhibit. (But if it's that, then surely you would start cheering for the opposition if they started to play prettier football than your side?) I don't mean to pick on Arsenal — exactly the same is true if you're a Chelsea fan: Russian owner, Italian manager, one lonely Englishman on the pitch last week (and he was from Dronfield, nearly 200 miles from west London). Or a fan of any of the big clubs, from Manchester United via Liverpool all the way down to Spurs. And in this way the visceral and habitual allegiance to a team has been winnowed away, so that top-level football today is really only for the 'anywheres'.

And more than that, the 'somewheres' are being told to get lost from the stands: they are not wanted any more. They carry with them baggage that is despised by not only our liberal elite, who wish us all to be eternally transient and to possess no allegiance to any town, city, county or nation, but also by big money, which thinks exactly the same thing for financial rather than ideological reasons. And so gradually the country becomes an homogenous mass: the regions merge imperceptibly, the accents disappear, our sense of place is dislocated. This has been happening for a while, of course — modern football simply accelerates the process.

Still, enjoy the new season. Manchester City to win the league, I would reckon, with not a Mancunian involved in them doing so.



SPECTATOR.CO.UK/RODLIDDLE
The argument continues online.

Don't forget the Yazidis

To avoid the next genocide, we must remember the last

TOM HOLLAND

As the floodwaters subsided, the Ark drifted across northern Iraq. Finally, with a crunching jolt, it hit dry land. Its timbers had scraped the peak of a mountain range called Sinjar. Water began to pour in. Fortunately, a black serpent, its coils as thick as an arm, moved to plug the breach. The Ark did not sink. Noah, his family, and all the various animals on board survived to repopulate the earth. This story, so familiar, so strange, can be seen illustrated in a shady courtyard that also boasts, just for good measure, the very spot where Adam is claimed to have been fashioned from dust. Lalish, a magical compound of domes, towers and stairways, stands in a valley in Iraqi Kurdistan.

To the Yazidis, a religious minority whose population straddles both the Kurdish region of Iraq and, to the south, the plain of Nineveh and the peaks of Sinjar, it is quite simply the holiest place in the world. Certainly, there is nowhere else in the Middle East which so seamlessly or mysteriously fuses the many cultural traditions of the region. Like Zoroastrians, the Yazidis tend sacred fires; like Christians, they practise baptism; like Muslims, they practise yearly fasts and daily prayers. One shrine at Lalish commemorates a sheikh who was once, very possibly, the Babylonian god of the sun. The Yazidis are charged with the palpable trace elements of antiquity.

Yet what makes people different can also make them hated. This is a lesson we hardly need teaching — it was Europeans who incubated ancient prejudices to such a monstrous pitch that our continent came to witness, within living memory, the most genocidal crime in history; it was Europeans, in the wake of Kristallnacht and Auschwitz, who vowed most fervently: 'Never again.'

The ambition to wipe out an entire people, though, did not die with the Nazis. On 3 August 2014, it came to Sinjar. Isis fighters who had just captured the vast Iraqi city of Mosul fanned out across the plain of Nineveh. The Yazidis were deliberately targeted for extermination. The men, and those women deemed too old to be auctioned off as concubines, were murdered. Girls were enslaved, sold, raped. Boys were abducted to be brainwashed and turned into killers for Isis.

Here is the closest comparison that the current carnage in the Middle East offers to the Nazi persecution of the Jews. If parallels

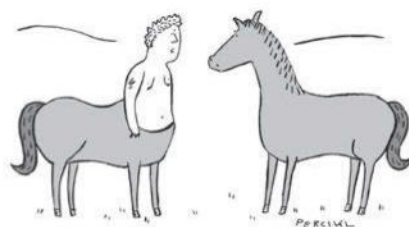
with the second world war must be drawn, then it is the Yazidis, of all the miserable peoples of Iraq and Syria, who have suffered the most terrible holocaust.

Why, then, has the world turned such a blind eye to their genocide? In large part it is because, numbering only 600,000, they rank as a minority in the genuine sense of the word. There are no Yazidi politicians in the West to press their case, no Yazidi columnists to beat the drum on their behalf. In August 2014, as Isis were busy shooting and enslaving, the panjandrum of the western media were in hotels 600 miles away, covering an altogether more familiar conflict. How could the sufferings of a people most journalists had never heard of compete for global attention with the reassuringly familiar rhythms of an Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip?

Only with the tear-choked appeal for help from the sole Yazidi MP in the Iraqi parliament did their voices at last start to be heard.

Men and boys beheaded in front of their families; girls as young as eight subjected to gang rape

Even then, though, western journalists found it impossible to cover the genocide on the ground. TV news anchors did not head from Israel to northern Iraq. This was entirely understandable. Unlike the rival combatants in Gaza, Isis had a habit of beheading westerners on YouTube. Any journalists who had sought to visit the front line in Sinjar would have been condemning themselves to a hideous and very public death. The Yazidi genocide was not televised. Now, with the defeat of Isis in northern Iraq, the full story of what happened back in that dreadful summer of 2014 is at last starting to emerge. Yazidis shot and thrown like refuse into pits; men and boys beheaded in front of their families;



'I'm transitioning.'

girls as young as eight subjected to gang rape; beatings; forced conversions; torture; slavery. In a camp I visited, a woman who had been raped for an entire year, then shot in the head when her owner grew tired of her, then finally sold back to her husband, lay curled in a foetal ball in a makeshift tent, rocking and moaning to herself.

Still, though, the horror of it all seems not to be cutting through. Perhaps we in the West cannot give it our full attention because we are too deadened by a sense of our own complicity in the miseries of Iraq, and by the complexities of it all. When I visited the summit of Mount Sinjar last year, I found examples of both. A great hulk of concrete marked where Saddam had stationed one of his Scud missile launchers in the first Gulf War; next to it, in tents massed around an ancient temple, was a camp of female and distractingly attractive Marxist guerrillas. The PKK, whose role in protecting Mount Sinjar is remembered with gratitude by many Yazidis, were stationed there in defence of their own (often brutally promoted) brand of revolutionary socialism. Just like their fellow Kurds in the armed forces of Iraqi Kurdistan, their aim all along has been to establish a permanent sphere of influence over Sinjar. To this goal, the longing of Yazidis for a secure and dignified autonomy has always been peripheral.

Now, with the liberation of Mosul by the Iraqi army, and the return of Shi'ite militias to the plain of Nineveh, fresh ingredients have been added to the mix of ambitions. No wonder, looking at this swirl of competing interests and remembering what happened the last time they stuck their hands into the Iraqi magimix, that western powers shrink from intervening. Yet we owe it to the Yazidis not to forget them. Even as the feuding of rival Kurdish and Arab factions stop refugees returning to their homes in Sinjar, the poisonous interpretation of Islamic scripture used to justify their genocide has not gone away. The ideologues of Isis have awakened ancient ghosts. In AD 830, so it is said, a caliph visited Harran, and ordered the city's inhabitants to convert or die. Centuries later, an Ottoman cleric issued a fatwa urging Muslims to slaughter Yazidi men and take their women as slaves: 'According to the principles of the four schools of law, it is the duty of all Muslims to kill them.' Isis are saying nothing new.

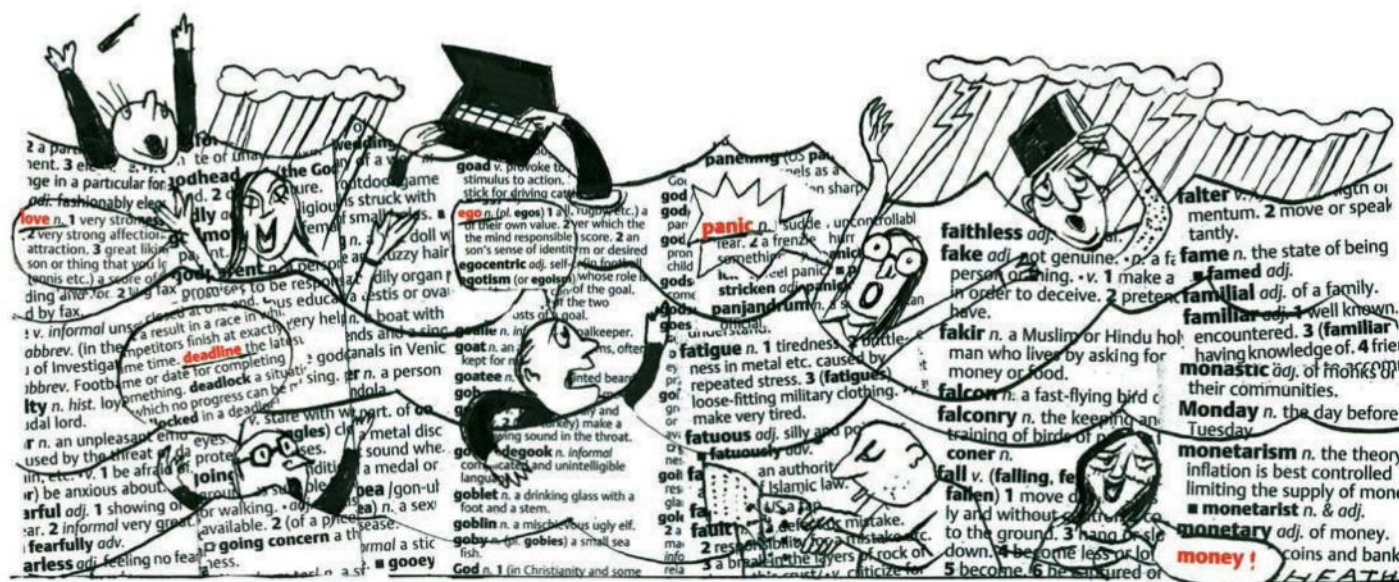
The Yazidis themselves claim to have survived 72 persecutions over the centuries. If they are to survive the 73rd as a distinct and coherent people, and not be scattered forever from their ancient homeland, they need the backing of the outside world. Just as Noah fashioned a mighty vessel capable of withstanding the Flood, the Yazidis now need an ark of their own; one secure enough to keep them safe, and bring them back to rest in Sinjar.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Tom Holland and Gareth Browne on the plight of the Yazidis.

How I write

Authors on inspiration, procrastination and the importance of pens



How do they do it? Among writers, the earnest audience member at a literary festival who asks, 'Do you write by hand or on a computer?' is a sort of running joke; an occasion for the rolling of eyes. And yet, let's enter a note in defence of that audience member: how novelists and the authors of literary nonfiction go about their work is interesting. If, as Kingsley Amis argued, most of a writer's work is the application of the seat of one's trousers to the seat of the chair, it's legitimate to ask: what trousers, what chair, where and when? In my experience the answers are wildly different from writer to writer; an experience borne out by our sampling — 400 words a day, or 15,000? A bath for inspiration, or exercise? Endless redrafting or first thought, best thought?

Sam Leith, literary editor

IRVINE WELSH

If you are a writer of my disposition you tend to grasp any opportunity for self-sabotage and distraction. So here's my shabby, rapidly declining two bob's worth.

The process to me is generally an ideal I am working towards or aspiring to, like drinking less or going to the gym more. Whenever I pompously declare 'I'm at my desk every morning by 7 a.m.' a cynical voice in my head screams 'You wish!'

But the good news is that it's easier to stop a teenager from masturbating than a real writer from writing.

The ideal I aspire to is rising at 6 a.m., having a light breakfast, being at my desk till 10.30, and hammering out words, lots and lots of them, with an utter disregard for quality or structure, while music blares in the background. Then I'll pack up and go to the boxing club for a workout — either a circuit, sparring on the pads, or some weights and cardio. This takes you away from the writing and, paradoxically, forgetting about it for a while allows the subconscious to do the heavy lifting.

Spending a lot of time obsessing about something the rest of the world has no connection with or window into is probably not a recipe for healthy relationships. I've learned a lot of de-roling techniques from actors; they have helped me considerably in reorienting myself back into the real world. But even they don't work when you are in that crazy place — the home straight, where you just have to batter those keys until you break the book or it breaks you. That's when your music goes off, your partner heads to her sister's and your cat loses weight.

Is it worth it? Well that's a question you can't even consider if you're a real writer, because it's just what you do and you are not going to stop until you drop.

• Irvine Welsh's *The Blade Artist* is out now.

SUSAN HILL

Of course I began with pen and ink and paper, and paper was expensive in terms of pocket money, so I asked for W.H. Smith tokens for Christmas. Then a neighbour brought up a stash of assorted old office notebooks from hiding somewhere, so the first novel was written in 'Ledger' and 'Salaries'.

I wrote by hand, on A4 ruled with feint and margin, for the next 20 years, making notes in whatever was to hand, often those red shiny Silvine ones from Woolworths. Those notebooks and MSs are now safely housed in handsome red boxes in Eton College library.

When the books were finished I typed them up on my father's old Remington. I could never write directly on it; too much clatter, too much metal coming between me and the words.

And so it continued until my first laptop, which changed everything. Laptops — close to you, quiet, instinctive, smooth to use. I can think on to a laptop. But I still make notes in notebooks, and write by hand if I need to hear what I am writing, think slowly and carefully. Keyboards run away with you.

I shock creative writing students, their tutors even more, when I say I only ever write one draft. But it's true. It just comes out of my head through my ears on to the

page. I finish, correct and tidy up, and that's it. If I get stuck, or reach the end knowing this one just doesn't work, I throw it away. There's always another idea or three waiting in the wings, or the notebook.

I think for a long time — books stew for months — make a few notes, then *go*. No creative writing course would accept me, but I am too old to change my ways and in any case, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

• *Susan Hill's Jacob's Room Is Full Of Books is out in October.*

GEOFF DYER

In the sixth form we'd get assigned essays to be written over the Christmas holidays. I always did these right away, either on Friday night or Saturday morning. Not because I liked writing but because the homework cast such a blight over the holiday that it was best to get it over with. I look back on that period as a precocious summit of self-discipline.

I'd love to recapture that iron resolve now, more than 40 years later, when it takes longer and longer to settle down to things, to fight off the dread of having to concentrate, when it seems likely that the only parole from this life sentence of homework will come with dementia or death. On the other hand, when I was younger, there were more things to tempt me out of the house, so it's actually easier to stay put, girding my loins in front of the computer.

My greatest achievement as a writer is undoubtedly the highly refined autocorrect settings on my laptop. Hundreds of words emerge fully formed from a few abbreviations. Sometimes these represent a saving of only a character or two — 'mtn' instantly becomes 'mountain' — but you put all these little savings together, over the course of a lifetime of writing and you've ('uve') probably ('proably') gained a couple of years even if thinking up, implementing and occasionally withdrawing shortcuts ('ben' becoming 'been' was great until Ben Webster turned into 'Been') will have taken far longer.

It is entirely in keeping with the vagaries of my nature that I fritter away my time fretting over things like this rather than making more meaningful programmes. (That was meant to come out as 'progress'.)

• *Geoff Dyer's latest novel is White Sands.*

KAMILA SHAMSIE

For years I tried to avoid building up 'writing habits'. They quickly become writing tics that get in the way of just sitting down and getting on with putting words on a page. When working on my first novel, I wrote in the daytime as well as the night, wrote by longhand as well as on my computer, wrote in one continent or another, just so long as I had a quiet space.

But at a certain point, habits creep in.

Sometimes for your own good: though I'm nocturnal I force myself to write during the day, so that I can be done by the evening. Sometimes for the sake of convenience: it's been years since I wrote longhand — editing is so much easier on a laptop. Sometimes for no good reason except that every writer needs to have something to be irrational about: while I can still shift from one continent to the next as I write, I can no longer — as I did with my first three novels — write while looking at a wall. I need a window to look out of, or better yet, a table and chair outdoors so I'm unenclosed.

I could pretend that lack of enclosure is necessary for the imagination to feel unbound, or some such hooey. Truth is, I let down my guard, I allowed in a tic, and now it's taken up residence and won't be shifted.

• *Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire was longlisted for the 2017 Man Booker Prize and will be released on 15 August.*

NICOLA BARKER

I establish rules (ear defenders, Apple laptop, not online, particular font for a particular novel, dedication up front, always hunched over my desk, etc etc) and then break them without the slightest qualm. Each book has its own way of defining what its wants and needs are.

What I do know is that Art is Innocent. This is my mantra. And Ambition Corrodes the Soul.

The work likes to be fluid. Fluidity is joyful — if you are having fun you throw things at the page willy-nilly. Having said that, I generally write something, reread it, read it again, reread, read it out loud, read, reread, congratulate myself, castigate myself. Back and forth x 1,000. Phew. The first paragraph.

I never write about what I know — so the whole world is my oyster (because I know so little!)

I don't take myself seriously. I do take the work seriously. I still don't really consider myself 'a writer', just someone who enjoys writing.

I am unashamedly agenda-driven, even though I often don't have a clue about what my agenda is.



'I'm confused about other people's sexuality.'

Never mollicoddle the reader. Heaven forbid! They deserve so much better.

• *Nicola Barker's latest novel is H(A)PPY.*

FRANCIS SPUFFORD

I have a beautifully quiet workroom at home, but somehow the expectant hush in there raises the stakes intolerably, and I only use it in an emergency. Instead I put my laptop in my bag and make my way to a café which meets my needs for a steady background murmur of other people's conversation, and decent coffee. Also, for tolerance of a gurning, teeth-picking, hair-twiddling, head-scratching man in the corner who sits for hours at a time, only buying Americanos. If anything, my present café is a little bit too white and bright and hipster-aspirational. There used to be one nearby that almost perfectly embodied my ideal of shabbiness and decay: but then it exceeded it, lost all its remaining clients, and closed.

So now I'm ensconced among coders and bike messengers and new mothers venturing out to meet their friends with tiny, tiny babies in slings. If I were a better human being, I expect I would be tempted to eavesdrop, but luckily my solipsism is great enough that I can treat the talk as a bath of lovely white noise, in which (I don't know why) I can usually find the thread of whatever I am thinking about. 400 or 500 words is an OK day, 700 or 800 words is a good day, and anything over 1,000 words is an astonishing, greased-lightning, festal superfluke of a day.

• *Francis Spufford's first novel Golden Hill won the 2016 Costa Prize for a debut novel.*

ADAM NICOLSON

I don't have many fixed habits except this — read anything relevant for a long time, maybe for 18 months, hungrily, anywhere it can be found; make notes, most of them on the pages of the books I am reading, and few of which get looked at again; keep a dictaphone in the car for fugitive phrases; then write the thing, very fast, 2,000 or 3,000 words a day every day for a couple of months, then stop and show it to someone. It is undoubtedly in bad shape. Susan Watt, who was my editor for many years, usually said at this stage, 'I think you'd better take another year.' A few months later, by which time a viable structure will hopefully have made itself clear, I write it again, fast enough, quarrying the first version, dumping the rubbish. This is best done alone in a very quiet place, with an excellent hot water system, as a bath is the only place to untangle the knots. Never more than four baths a day. Meanwhile: love the reader.

• *Adam Nicolson's The Seabird's Cry: The Life and Loves of Puffins, Gannets and Other Ocean Voyagers is available now.*

Continues overleaf →

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

I learned to write professionally by working for IPC comics and magazines. You were trained to make every element of the story (continuity, picture, speech balloons, characters etc) drive the plot and reveal the elements in properly paced scenes. No *deus ex machina* allowed. Introduction. Development. Resolution. Every manuscript I produced in my early days had exactly the same number of pages. I created a series of formulas which proved useful in writing the fantasy novels I produced in my late teens and twenties. Because I was a very fast typist, I could produce a novel in three days. Knowing precisely what element is needed as you go helps considerably.

I'd get up, make the wife a cuppa, get the kids to school, start work and have an hour off for lunch, finishing around 6 p.m. — 15,000 words a day. However, as my literary skills and ambitions grew, I became a prisoner of those formulas, knowing too many narrative tricks; so I had to rid myself of conventions I had created. I developed what I hoped was a different structure for every novel or novel sequence.

Mother London was like a wheel and the Pyat sequence essentially linear. I had written *Gloriana* as a simple allegory divided into four parts conforming to the seasons and offering a kind of argument to Spenser. By the time I wrote my *War Amongst the Angels* books, I was using a consciously musical structure and making them seem as loose and lyrical as possible. With every book I set the goals higher and made them more difficult, believing that a certain tension is added to a story which means it doesn't get stale to the reader.

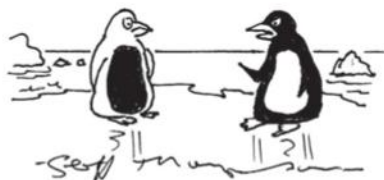
I'm slower these days and have no kids to consider but knowing what elements I need for structure still helps me work pretty quickly, though I now take three years rather than three days to finish a book.

• *Michael Moorcock's Legends of the Multiverse* is published by Hollywood Comics.

GARY SHTEYNGART

I write in bed next to a coffee machine.

• *Gary Shteyngart's Super Sad True Love Story* won the 2010 Salon Book Award.



'Why must you be so damn negative?'

The joy of sex

Stop confusing chastity with decency

JULIE BURCHILL

Your typical Trollope-loving, Brahms-bothering *Spectator* reader probably won't be aware that the most recent winner of *Big Brother* was a girl called Isabelle Warburton, but her victory was a joy to behold — and a lesson to be learned. The unemployed 21-year-old had a tan so orange it made Oompa-Loompas look pale and interesting, and on her first night in the house she was already wisecracking about how she'd caught an STD in Ibiza from a fellow contestant. Everyone presumed she was an air-headed bimbo, but she went on to display the most extraordinary decency — the only word for it — with her honesty, self-sacrifice and boldness. She took on and saw off the strutting alpha male of the house and volunteered herself for eviction to save a rival. Unlikely as it may sound, Isabelle Warburton is a striking example of how excellent the often sneered-at young women of today really are.

I pity people who confuse chastity with decency; it's both immature and moribund. Why do so many curtain-twitching prigs still think that girls who aren't ashamed to have sex are Bad People? Why do tight-lipped hacks write why-o-whiny newspaper pieces about the decline of morality and the end of the world as we know it? If they were nuns, I'd still disagree with them but I'd respect their point of view. The idea of journalists — whose pursuit of sex, drink and money puts a 1970s Aerosmith tour to shame — getting on their high horses never fails to bring a snigger to my sneer.

But it's not just my lot having a go. Take any elderly actress; when their nipples go south, so the nose goes north. High-profile women who would strip off at the drop of a hat when young and perky suddenly come over all moral once they've been mugged by gravity. Helen Mirren said while publicising her *The Queen* film: 'A world of duty, sacrifice and honour meeting up with the Walkers crisps generation of consumer celebrity, going to Ibiza, taking your top off and staggering about boasting about how many guys you shagged that night.' The singer Annie Lennox, who was once more than happy to prance about in her scanties, has said: 'Nowadays, women are sexually explicit and they use this as a

tool to get popular, and I find this very one-dimensional.'

Those who appear to have learned their history from the lid of a Quality Street tin would have us believe that the past was a sexually continent country, but in Restoration London a whopping one in six women was a sex worker, and in Victorian England it was the fourth-largest female occupation. When sex is at its most pathologically private, it is often at its worst. Female sexual modesty is most prized in the most corrupt and oppressive societies. If approached in a spirit of fun and frankness, in the manner of Isabelle Warburton, sex can provide human beings with some of the best moments of their lives. As Sir John Betjeman said when asked towards the end of his life if he had any regrets: 'Yes — not enough sex.'

As the brilliant young writer Phoebe Waller-Bridge recently said of her sex-

Women who'd strip off when young and perky come over all moral once they've been mugged by gravity

crazed heroine in *Fleabag*: 'You're always being told you're at your peak, you're the most attractive you'll ever be, so get out there and use it. But it's such a weird conflicted message: I must be more promiscuous; I must make the most of this dying, shrivelling shell that I've been gifted for this short amount of time. But at the same time, it's "Don't be a slut." I felt really strongly while writing that there was no such thing as a slut, and I was just going to erase that from the equation.'

Forget all the alarmist nagging about the way that young girls today are being encouraged to define themselves solely by their sexuality — if that was so, would female academic achievement be going up as never before? I think it far more likely that they just don't see why they have to choose between being a slut or a swot, a bookworm or a booty-shaker — they can be both or neither, at once, or now and then, and it really doesn't matter. Chastity and decency are not the same — and, frankly, anyone who believes they are must be either a prude or a pervert.

Dave's kept his head down, so let him chillax



David Cameron was in the news again this week after being paid £1 million a minute to give a speech explaining why Brexit was a terrible mistake at the annual Gay Strangers' Guild gala dinner at a brutal dictatorship in central Asia, before spending a week cruising the Baltic on the yacht of Putin's second-favourite oligarch with the prettiest members of the Russian men's lacrosse team.

No, wait. My bad. Had he done that, as we know from similar cases, he would have got off scot-free. Instead, the ex-PM did something far, far worse in the eyes of our ever watchful media: he was photographed enjoying himself at a Cotswolds pop festival with a glass of booze in one hand and a fag in the other.

The press launched themselves on Dave with all the ravenous glee of those evil parasitic sea fleas that gnawed the leg of the Australian boy who went paddling in the sea off Melbourne and turned it into a jellied pulp (just Google it — but only once you've had your breakfast). That's because, get this, our Dave hadn't just been caught outrageously letting his hair down at Wilderness Festival; he'd been photographed talking to a woman wearing a sequined jacket with a neon pink heart embroidered with the word 'Corbyn'. Oh the hilarity!

According to the *Independent* (an online freesheet) it was Just. About. The. Most. Embarrassing. Thing. Ever. It quoted the jacket's owner, Lucy Edwards, as saying: 'He was so mad when he saw me walk off with what was on my back.' Which I'm sure was exactly what Cameron thought — he wasn't just being polite to a pushy stranger at a festival or anything.

The BBC, meanwhile, went for the smoking angle. Here was the perfect excuse to contact one of its favourite health 'n' safety organisations in the guise of a light-hearted, impartial news feature. So it rang up Action on Smoking and Health and got its chief commissar to come up with this zinger: 'It's vital that smoking cessation services are properly funded and available to all who need them, whether plumber or former prime minister.' But neither could compete

with the acid disdain of *Esquire*, formerly the other men's style mag that wasn't *GQ*, but now, apparently, the snarkily right-on house journal for Corbynista hipsters who want to be Patrick Bateman out of *American Psycho*. 'Once a (semi) respected world leader, Cameron's life post-politics has been diluted to that of a soft-chinned jester in a gingham Harrington jacket, grimacing for smartphone cameras while people wearing those naff "Corbyn" Nike bootleg T-shirts snicker into their Instagram captions and group chats,' its commentator wrote with all the justified bitterness and rage of a privately educated teenager who has reluctantly deigned to join his fam at

He's not lining his pockets with the blood money of despots while pretending to heal the world

their £10,000-a-week villa rental in Tuscany, only to have his whole experience ruined by the sight of his father dad-dancing to an old Italian house track in the local club.

Who are these terrible people who write this desperate crap? I know journalism doesn't pay and can't attract the talent these days. I realise — apologies to the late Frank Johnson — that August is the month where nothing ever happens. Seriously, though, things really must be very close indeed to the hang-up-your-typewriter-now phase of the terminal decline of the Fourth Estate when I am so moved by the plight of my disappointing old spliff-smoking buddy



that I stop gazing across my turquoise infinity pool over the wine-dark sea towards the Greek mainland, shake off my gin-soaked haze, and rise to his defence.

Because I think his treatment here is disgraceful, I really do. We've had our ups and downs over the years, have Dave and I. In fact I can tell you exactly how long ago it was that I wrote anything positive about him. It was in this column at the time of that Tory leadership contest in the Blair era when he was up against David Davis. I'd been to watch him at a hustings, come away quite impressed and written something like: 'He'd be a great Prime Minister, if only we'd let him...'

OK, so I was wrong about that small detail. But it's water under the bridge now. No matter how many awful things may have happened on his watch — and he did give us Brexit, if nothing else — Dave is now once more a private citizen, behaving in a manner befitting a private citizen, and deserves therefore to be treated as such.

It would be very different, I'd argue, if he'd gone to Wilderness and done a Jeremy Corbyn: mounted the podium, seized the mic and completely ruined the mellow vibe by inflicting his tedious politics on the crowd. But he didn't. He went there to do the same thing he used to do as prime minister, only with more justification this time: to chillax with his homies in a typical, ordinary Oxfordshire estate called Cornbury Park.

Adam Buxton captured it well in his 'Festival Song': 'Festivals used to be awful/ Just crusties and weirdo groups./ There was nowhere to charge your mobile/ and nowhere nice for doing poops./ Now they're often in stately homes/ with global cuisine that's ace. And you can leave your kids in a really nice crèche/ while you get off your face.'

Precisely. And what's so wrong with that? Cameron isn't whining and sulking (at least not publicly) like Ted Heath used to do; he's not lining his pockets with the blood money of despots while pretending to heal the world like Tony Blair; he is spending his retirement — so far at least — with discretion, stoicism and a modicum of dignity. So leave the poor guy alone.

Snobbery in the age of social media



We like to think we have moved on from the age of snobbery. Judging others by birth or status, or at least being seen to, is the height of rudeness, and just not very cool.

But English snobbery is in fact as potent as before — and possibly even more insidious. Among my age group of twentysomethings, it is rife. Our elders might think of us as fiercely egalitarian, and in some ways that's true. We aren't as obviously obsessed with class. But we've found sneakier ways of being snobs.

It starts with social media. Everyone has an online profile, and that has created a new generation of ultra snobs, who lurk behind their phones watching their peers, noting subtle differences. I do it and I know many of my friends do too.

Instagram, the photosharing service, is the modern snob's favourite platform. You don't have to tell people how smart you are; you can show them. Instasnobs can tag their location, so that followers can look up which country estate they spent the weekend on. They can also type notable names into the captions underneath their snaps, in case followers don't appreciate who they know: 'OMG @emwoodhouse you look amazing.'

There is Instasnobbery and inverse Instasnobbery, and you see masses of both in all the Instatribes posting pictures of themselves. The cool festival-going blondes with faces full of glitter are signalling how free and easy they are compared to the neurotic earth mothers. The bearded flâneurs are differentiating themselves from the fusty artists. The literary hipsters show that they are friendly with, but not the same as, their aristo peers. Everyone jostles to reveal who they know, where they go, what they do. The real sophisticate trick is to do all that and then declare, on social media, that you have had enough of social media. But those people almost always come back.

Unlike the old snobs, who could be quite candid in their judgments, Instasnobs frown on being explicitly horrid. That gives the game away, and nobody wants that. Instead, everyone is adorable. Hearts and kisses are

posted, alongside smiley faces and sweet little notes about how wonderful everything is. It's in the private forums such as WhatsApp where the Mitford-style bitchiness happens. The worst insult is the term 'basic', the millennial word for vulgar.

Under the emoji-clad niceness, the brute forces of social power are exercised. Those with the most followers, the most 'likes' and the most people fawning over them define what is or isn't tasteful. Posts will be deleted if they don't garner enough interest. There

Instagram snobs frown on being explicitly horrid. That would give the game away, and no one wants that

is plenty of money to be made from a popular account, although hawking one's wares online is considered grubby unless you are an artist of some sort.

Social media snobbery is a great example of what Sigmund Freud called the 'narcissism of small differences'. As English society has become ever more prosperous, traditional class structures have broken down. The middle class has expanded, and so has the range of subtle material differences we use to judge each other.

'It is impossible for *any* Briton, perhaps, not to be a Snob in some degree,' wrote Thackeray in 1848. In his *Book of Snobs*, he listed various categories: party-giving snobs,



'At last! A drugs service that hasn't been cut.'

dinner-giving snobs, country snobs, country-party snobs, military snobs, English snobs on the continent, literary snobs, marriage snobs, club snobs. All these types are still with us, in one way or another. Today you could add social media snobs, a group I have probably now joined.

The modern club snob is an interesting creature. He no longer spends his time in Pall Mall. He — or it could just as well be a she — has moved to one of the fashionable Soho House clubs. Soho House famously introduced a 'no tie' rule, which is just about the most perfect example of inverse-stuffiness I can think of. Membership was originally intended for those with a 'creative soul' rather than 'wealth and status', but within the clubs, everything is designed to be either photographed or bought.

Soho House publishes a magazine for its members called *House Notes*. I came across a copy while I was at a party at Soho Farmhouse, a countryside outpost of the club which has all the charm of a totalitarian state. The latest issue is dedicated to 'Taste' and the editor's picks include upcoming events on the 'Neuro-psychology of food porn' and 'The new vulgar aesthetic', as well as 'bully-proof' martial arts classes for kids.

Most striking was an article written by the veteran snob Peter York, author of the *Sloane Ranger Handbook*, on the 'democratisation of taste'. 'Good taste, as all true Marxists know, is that of the ruling class to which every sentient Wannabe aspires,' writes York, somewhat nonsensically. 'It's socially defined, taught and reinforced. Clever, determined, socially mobile people who break away from their backgrounds develop new tastes: effortless, elegant, restrained. Not being noticed — and pretending not to notice either.'

So that's what social mobility is all about; breaking free from old snobberies to create new ones. Snobbery breeds snobbery, and for every new member of Soho House, there is someone else who has taken to sneering at its pretensions. In our supposedly classless, meritocratic society, snobbery has never been so common.

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BAROMETER

Out with a whimper

Usain Bolt managed only a bronze in his last appearance in the 100 metres at the World Athletics Championships in London. Final appearances often don't go to plan:

— **Don Bradman** was bowled for a second-ball duck by Eric Hollies in his last Test at the Oval in 1948. Four runs would have given him a career average of 100.

— **Stanley Matthews** bowed out in 1965 in a testimonial between his personal XI and an international XI, which won 6-4.

— **Pelé** appeared for the last time in a Brazil-Yugoslavia friendly on 18 July 1971. The match ended 2-2, with neither of Brazil's goals scored by Pelé.

— However, **Martina Navratilova** did win her last match — the final of the mixed doubles at the US Open in 2006.

Caught in the net

Digital Minister Matt Hancock proposed a 'right to be forgotten' law, allowing people to demand the deletion of information about them online. How many net users say their digital footprint is crushing them?

Email or social media profiles hacked **21%**
Relationship trouble thanks to a social media posting **13%**
Personal information stolen **11%**
Victim of online scam **6%**
Reputation damaged by online posts... **6%**
Lost job opportunity thanks to online information about them **1%**

Source: Pew Research Center

Money bags

Tesco is to stop selling single-use plastic bags at the end of this month. The number handed out by retailers has shrunk by 85 per cent since a 5p charge was introduced in 2015 — but which shops handed out the most in 2016-17?

Tesco.....	637m	M&S.....	92.5m
Morrisons..	191m	Aldi.....	67.2m
Asda.....	165m	Waitrose.....	62.8m
Ocado.....	128m	Lidl.....	53m
Iceland.....	100m	Sainsbury's..	51.7m

Source: Defra

Getaway gambles

A British woman survived being shot after taking a wrong turn into a Brazilian favela. Some of the most and least dangerous holiday destinations measured by annual murder rate (per 100,000 population):

MOST	LEAST		
US Virgin Islands.....	52.6	Indonesia.....	0.5
Jamaica.....	43.2	Spain.....	0.66
South Africa.....	34.2	Maldives.....	0.85
St Kitts & Nevis.....	33.5	Greece.....	0.85
Bahamas.....	29.8	UK.....	0.92
Brazil.....	26.7	Morocco.....	1.05

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

A tale of two Valleys

California's tech elite have made social inequality worse

JAMIE BARTLETT

Silicon Valley looks like a cross between Milton Keynes and the set of the *Stepford Wives*. Row after row of ordinary houses and picket fences, clustered in villages notable only for the mega-companies they serve: Menlo Park (Facebook), Cupertino (Apple) or Mountain View (Google). There's the odd charm, but it's generally clean, sterile, young, overpriced. Life here, they say, is five years ahead of everywhere else. Well, if that's the case, I've seen the future and it is a bit disturbing.

The surface ordinariness of the Valley hides a deep utopianism. In the late 1960s San Francisco was the home of both hippie counterculture and the early computer communities. Both groups shared an aversion to the existing order. For the early techies, digital technology was a means with which to escape the rules and regulations of overbearing governments and build a better world.

The big-tech firms see themselves as heirs to this emancipating counterculture, despite the fact that they are now among the most powerful and richest companies in the world. You hear the utopianism in the visions of Silicon Valley's leading lights: to organise the world's information, to connect every single person, to end ageing, etc. Silicon Valley tells itself it is not just about money: it's about improving the world.

Even altruistic visionaries need money to survive, so they scramble after investment, which is on tap from wealthy venture capitalists. But investment brings new responsibilities: profit margins, quarterlies, insane growth targets. That drives an old-fashioned ruthless capitalism which lies just beneath the beanbags and T-shirts veneer. The meeting of techno-utopianism and profit-making is an unstoppable force, and it has a dark side. One result is that it is creating two almost entirely separate worlds.

Firstly, there is the Silicon Valley for the tech workers. A quarter of the population — approximately half a million people — work in the 'innovation industry', as they call it. Even the typical tech worker can quickly expect to be earning well over \$100,000 a year. For the biggest companies,

the median salary is more than \$150,000. These professionals, who are mostly under 40, want to live in bustling San Francisco. So each morning they hop on to a private wifi-enabled coach from one of the dozens of pick-up points in increasingly gentrified streets, and head down freeway 101 into Menlo Park or Cupertino or Mountain View. There they pass the day working in the cool workspaces packed with other creatives and innovators making the world a better place, looking constantly for other industries to 'disrupt'. It's thrilling and full of purpose.

One by-product of this disruptive tech sector is the second Silicon Valley. It's a place where minorities struggle on low-wage jobs, serving the largely white affluent tech guys. The medium house value in

The meeting of techno-utopianism and profit-making is an unstoppable force, and it has a dark side

San Francisco is now around a million dollars, and average rent is more than \$3,000 per month for a two-bedroom house. This is beyond the reach of anyone but tech workers. (The average salary in San Francisco is \$46,000 — far less if you don't work in tech.) According to Rebecca Solnit, a San Franciscan writer and long-time resident, money and gentrification are crushing the spirit of the place. 'There's no more time for idealism in San Francisco any more,' she told me as we wandered through the Haight-Ashbury district. It used to be a place for radicalism, alternative ways of life. But now everyone's too busy working, commuting or being priced out. 'I have no idea what'll happen, but it feels like things are just falling apart,' Rebecca said.

The first thing that strikes most visitors to San Francisco is the very visible homelessness problem. There are 7,500 homeless people on the streets. Double that are registered homeless — one of the highest per capita in the country. This has been a long-standing problem in San Francisco (and

much of California), but locals here say it's never been this bad. Perhaps it's the contrast that's the problem: there are parts of this glorious metropolis that reek of used needles, human waste and food banks, sometimes in the shadows of the world's biggest and coolest companies. One morning I saw people openly shooting up on a busy street: it wasn't yet 9 a.m.

Silicon Valley does not consider itself responsible for creating these problems. People always complain when places are gentrified; and many of San Francisco's problems are the usual ones for big cities — housing shortages, transit overloads, struggling public services, key workers being priced out. The tech workers don't have malign intent. But the animating philosophy of Silicon Valley is to 'move fast and break things' — as the Facebook motto goes — and to drive restlessly toward innovation and efficiency. And because most people here really believe they are doing good, they rarely stop to check for side effects. Perhaps Airbnb's warm vision of allowing people to 'feel at home in every city in the world' justified its decision to behave, according to local supervisor Aaron Peskin, in a way that's more ruthless and arrogant than any other business in San Francisco. Perhaps Google's desire to 'do no evil' justified its breach of EU competition law. Perhaps Uber's car-sharing environmentalism encouraged its heads to use slightly sinister psychological tools to squeeze every drop of productivity out of its drivers.

Tech business don't need huge factories and thousands of mid-level employees — they need lines of code, algorithms and highly skilled teams. That's why Facebook, worth hundreds of billions, only has around 12,000 full-time staff. At its peak General Motors was worth half that, and employed almost half a million people. This creates what MIT economist David Autor calls a 'bar-bell shaped economy': well-paid knowledge economy jobs at the top end of the market, and loads of low-paid service sector jobs at the bottom. The middle, such as trucking, manufacturing, journalism and logistics, is withering away. Most of the new non-tech jobs are in the service industry, where wages are very low, and that is contributing to the affordability crisis for all but the very well-off.

Being disruptors, tech firms have a fractious relationship with regulators. All companies in Silicon Valley pay an annual tax based on the value of their property. Measuring and extracting that tax falls to Larry Stone, the septuagenarian county assessor of Santa Clara County. 'It's like a game of cat and mouse with Apple,' he told me recently, as he showed me Apple's newly built headquarters. Larry's team assessed the value of all Apple's property in his catchment area to be around \$7 billion.

But Apple disputed 99 per cent of Larry's assessments, filing that their properties were worth a mere \$57 million. If Apple wins the appeal — which Larry assures me they will not — it would reduce the most valuable company in the world's tax bill by \$70 million. Even if they don't, taxpayers have to foot the bill for the tussle, which is doubly frustrating when you look at the state of Silicon Valley's roads, or San Francisco's homelessness problem, or its schools, where Hispanic and Latino students made up more than a third of 11th-grade test takers in Silicon Valley last year, and where 80 per cent did not meet state standards in maths.

Not everyone is as bad as Apple, said Larry. Facebook, for example, are far more compliant and community-minded. But Larry fears that the area might turn into a modern-day Detroit: the city that was once the envy of the world, now bankrupt. 'Everything happens much faster here,' he said. 'We could go the same way, if we don't come together as a community.'

Right now, the Silicon Valley geniuses are hard at work on the next wave of changes to which we'll need to adapt over

San Francisco used to be a place for radicalism — now everyone's too busy working or being priced out

the next five to ten years: artificial intelligence, self-driving cars, robotics and automation. None of these are job-creating fields — quite the opposite, in fact. It seems highly likely that the newest technologies will only exacerbate Silicon Valley's cruel dichotomy: a beautiful, hip utopia for some, a struggling dystopia for others.

By the time we realise, it will be too late to do anything about it. The disruptors will have moved on to the next exciting technology, and we'll be too hooked on the possibilities to bother.

Jamie Bartlett's new book Radicals: Outsiders Changing the World is published by Penguin.



'Is there an afterlife? I hope not!'

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Trump and his empire



All the news emerging from the White House seems to suggest that the USA is in that state so beloved by journalists — 'total chaos'. But is the White House the USA? One could ask the same of the relationship between the Roman Empire and the emperor during much of the third century AD.

Between 235 and 285 AD, the Roman Empire, under severe assault from Germanic tribes and the Persian Empire, was wracked by civil strife. In that period, at least 51 men, legitimately or not, were hailed as 'emperor'. Some of these lasted a matter of days, some months, and the longest 15 years.

But if the empire creaked, it did not fall apart; and the period from Diocletian (emperor 284–305) to Constantine (d. 337) saw the whole structure restabilised.

Further, if you were not among the elites, or a legionary in the Roman army, or living on the empire's edge, it is possible that, for all the upheaval at the top, life might have trundled on much as usual.

The emperor had no interest in economic control — how could he anyway, in the absence of a centralised banking system? — let alone in 'preserving jobs'. His main concern was to raise (relatively low) taxes to keep Rome fed, and supply and pay the army, in order to stamp out rebellion and protect the empire's boundaries.

This tax-raising function was in the hands of the local elites running the 2,000 or so cities, overseen by the governors of the c. 40 provinces. For the rest, local economies got on as best they could. As long as the army maintained overall military control, the empire essentially ran itself, and had been doing so since (technically) 241 BC. Despite raising tax demands, debasement of coinage and constant change at the top, this culture of empire was firmly enough embedded to withstand even the turmoil of the 3rd century AD.

Which brings the argument back to the USA. The differences are, of course, enormous; e.g., the President's heavy economic responsibilities, unknown to Roman emperors. But the USA's well-established quasi-Roman federal culture is surely strong enough to endure whatever Trump throws at it.

— Peter Jones

Unbearable wait

Sir: Like Jenny McCartney, I too am fed up with flying ('Civilised air travel? Pigs might fly', 5 August). However, it's not for any rudeness on the part of the staff, which I have as yet not encountered. Nor is it the lack of meals. Who needs them? No, it's the agony of endless queues at the airport, the misery of taking off shoes and putting them back on, with no chairs supplied, and the confiscation of small items overlooked in packing. This is no fault of the air companies, but the rise in terror attacks has made such scrutiny necessary. I have ceased to travel long journeys by plane and try to manage with rail.

*Sheila Berger
Bern, Switzerland*

Heating disorder

Sir: Ross Clark ('Road to nowhere', 5 August) highlights the likely limited range of electric cars. However he does not mention another factor. The range compared to petrol or diesel is sure to be further reduced in cold weather. With water-cooled petrol and diesel cars, the cabin heat is provided by waste heat from the engine cooling system, which would otherwise be dispersed via the radiator. In other words, the cabin heat is free (though the fan still costs). In electric cars, the cabin heat would have to be provided by the battery, further reducing the range.

I do not know how much research has been done into this but judging by the cost of running a 1-2kW electric fire at home, it is probably significant.

*Peter White
Boardmills, Lisburn*

Snap happy

Sir: Jenny Coad disapproves of those who indulge their love of photography ('Snapping point', 5 August). I rarely take photos with my smartphone, mostly because I don't remember to, but I support the right of others to do so. Some of us prefer to experience art and music without a device in front of our faces. Yet few of us would criticise those who choose to sketch their favourite artwork or who sit with their eyes closed to allow the music to wash over them. Some people experience an occasion in richer detail and with greater pleasure when they try to frame it for a photograph.

If Instagram is the price of getting young people into art galleries and concerts, then it is worth paying.

*Matthew Grint
Sevenoaks, Kent*

Armed services spending

Sir: Allan Mallinson's piece 'A Fighting Chance' (5 August) is a plea to maintain the size of the army at the expense of the other two services. As with many such pieces, it repeats a range of assertions about the army's importance that are simply not borne out by recent history; to choose just one, the second world war ended with the atom bomb rather than infantrymen firing at each other. He also complains, incorrectly, about expensive Royal Navy and RAF equipment programmes squeezing the budget. A quick look at the most recent MoD Annual Report and Accounts (p129), which treats strategic equipment programmes separately, shows the army's ten-year equipment procurement programme is priced at more than £15 billion, while those of the Royal Navy and the RAF are £10 billion apiece.

Far better to make a persuasive case for the greater MoD spending that is clearly required, rather than playing the game that makes life easiest for governments of pitting the services against each other.

*Ralph Dunn
Thornbury, South Gloucestershire*

The wife-beater question

Sir: James Delingpole's laments those 'when did you stop beating your wife?' questions ('No true Tory can support this gender idiocy', 29 July) but like many before him, he identifies the wrong question. The classically difficult question to answer is: 'Have you stopped beating your wife?' 'No' being the answer that any honourable husband ought to give, but also the truthful answer of a wife-beater. Although domestic violence is an area in which I practise, I have never found it necessary to ask either formulation in court.

*Julien Foster
Temple, London WC2*

Get a life

Sir: I particularly enjoyed the article 'I Am An Embittered Old Man Who Fails To Understand That The World Around Me Is Developing And Refuse To Educate Myself, Hence I Lash Out In Any Way I Know How In Order To Feel Important' by James Delingpole (29 July). I think it's disgraceful that upstarts like Simone de Beauvoir or Virginia Woolf get to point out that gender is socially constructed and that there is no reasonable way of defending the idea that individuals with one set of genitals have to dedicate the entirety of their lives to upholding the values arbitrarily attached to whichever genitals they possess.

Sarcasm aside, I do not agree with every piece I read in *The Spectator*, but never before have I been moved to write in to express my contempt for the narrow-mindedness, blatant intellectual insecurity, almost parodic sense of superiority and outright homophobia of something in your pages. Mr Delingpole, with due respect, get a life; no one is forcing you to find a new gender identity because diversity and tolerance is being propagated.

*Isabella Wheaton
Tonbridge, Kent*

BB's legacy

Sir: I was delighted by the book review of *Bowland Beth: The Story of an English Hen Harrier* (5 August) and the tribute paid to the 20th-century breed of nature writers. BB (Denys Watkins-Pitchford) was a particular talent and we at the BB Society are dedicated to keeping his memory alive.

His other legacy was the conservation of the Purple Emperor butterfly: owing to his reintroduction programme, the species survives today in an established colony in Fermyn Woods, Northamptonshire.

*Bryan Holden
BB Society, Solihull*

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Why is your holiday exchange rate so awful? Because investors see hope for the eurozone



As usual for August, I'm in France, where the news in brief is 'Euro up, Macron down'. The youthful French president, who swept to power with two-thirds of the second round vote in May, has seen his approval rating plunge to 36 per cent — at the time of writing, 2 per cent worse than Donald Trump's latest score in the US. Macron's move to slash housing benefits for millions of lower-income citizens, including students, is one factor that has brought his honeymoon with French voters to an abrupt end, though his proposed labour law reforms are still playing well with employers. Two-thirds of French small-business owners say they are satisfied with his performance so far and optimistic that he will improve the economy — an accolade never achieved by his socialist predecessor François Hollande, and only briefly by Nicolas Sarkozy before that.

As for the euro, it has gained 12 per cent against the dollar this year, recently trading back above its symbolically important January 1999 launch rate of 1.1789. It has also soared against the pound — as British holidaymakers may have noticed, especially if they bought their euros at Southampton airport when Moneycorp was reported last week to be offering a cruel exchange rate of €0.90 to the pound.

The currency trend is bad for French exporters and a dampener on growth, but good for continental self-confidence. The euro has even been perky against the safe-haven Swiss franc, indicating a real swing of investor sentiment towards the eurozone, where growth is running at around 2 per cent (compared to 1.7 per cent expected for the UK this year) and unemployment is at its lowest since 2009.

That last statistic, at 9.1 per cent, is still double the rate of joblessness in the UK — reminding us that everything is relative in economic performance. What we're watching is a region burdened with huge structural problems, inflexible labour markets and the straitjacket of an ill-conceived single currency, but doing a little better than it was

before and with at least one dynamic new leader, Macron, pushing a pro-business policy agenda. And that makes a relatively good impression compared to what *Le Figaro* calls '*La perte de leadership de l'Amérique de Trump*' — and what to foreign observers must look like the blundering uncertainty of Britain's Brexit negotiating strategy.

Role model

How sad that Dame Helen Alexander, the former *Economist* chief executive and first (and so far only) female president of the CBI, has died of cancer aged 60. The *Economist* said she 'relied on a quiet wisdom, listening not lecturing' but her consensual style made her a persuasive role model for women striving to reach the top of the business anthill — strong in arguing for more women on boards while also presenting a thoughtful face of big business in response to popular anger after the financial crisis. When she gave her first interview after taking up the CBI post in 2009, she was also brave enough to start on the front foot by criticising the size of the public sector and its pension liabilities.

But one issue on which I suspect she could not make much impact — either from her CBI podium or as chair of the remuneration committees of both Rolls-Royce and Centrica — was that of excessive boardroom pay. That's because the men in suits who predominate in that arena still think alike and remain wilfully deaf to change, however elegantly advocated.

Barcelona to Paris

In a quiet season for business news, the giant cesspit that is the world of elite football can be relied upon to provide a money story with a pungent whiff to it. I refer to the transfer of the 25-year-old Brazilian known only as Neymar from Barcelona to Paris St Germain for a world-record fee close to £200 million. When Neymar was bought by Barcelona from Santos of Brazil in 2013, a

£200 million break clause was inserted in his contract in the belief that no club in the world could possibly afford to buy him out. But PSG has done so even though Spanish football authorities refused to facilitate the payment, in the belief that it might breach 'financial fair play' rules designed to prevent clubs spending beyond their means.

The complexities of this tale are probably too much for *Spectator* readers. Suffice to add that Neymar's contracts are brokered by his father — and that both Neymars are reportedly under investigation by tax authorities, as was Barcelona after the transfer from Santos. As for PSG, it is France's most famous football club but with a stadium capacity of just 48,000 you might wonder how it can possibly afford a player who will cost €30 million a year on top of his transfer fee. The answer is that football at this level has nothing to do with what fans want or can afford, and everything to do with impenetrable deal-making; and by the way, did I mention PSG is owned by a state investment company from Qatar?

Time for lunch

Never mind the money stuff, I hear you say, where are the restaurant tips? Last August I lightened the column by naming places to eat across France — and I gathered that many readers enjoyed the diversion. So I'll do the same again this year, but with emphasis on what the French call *rapport qualité prix* to reflect the current mood of caution in consumer spending. And my first pick is Le Vieux Logis at Tremolat, a slightly faded de luxe hotel on a wooded loop of the River Dordogne. It offers a five-course menu with the sommelier's wine choices at €125 (or £139 if you've just flown in from Southampton) but clearly that's not my value-for-money suggestion, even though the dining terrace was filled with English lunchers. My more frugal party enjoyed a €17 menu du jour at the nearby Bistrot d'en Face (under the same ownership), then strolled into the Vieux Logis's topiary garden for a satisfying *petit café*.



BOOKS

A dazzling vision

Working in semi-darkness, Thomas Gainsborough produced some of the airiest, most poetic paintings imaginable, says *Philip Hensher*

Gainsborough

by James Hamilton

Weidenfeld, £25, pp. 448

There are a number of reports by his contemporaries of Thomas Gainsborough at work. They make you realise what a very strange painter he was. There was an element of theatricality in his working practice — the public would expect to be astonished when they glimpsed it — but, even so, it is difficult to imagine any artist producing anything using Gainsborough's methods. He painted in semi-darkness, and an observer reported that sitters for portraits found that 'neither they nor their pictures were scarcely discernible'.

The canvas, if large, was hung loosely, 'secured by small cords'. James Hamilton describes it as 'rigged perhaps like a small yacht, the canvas belling with every move'. It was placed right next to the sitter, and some commentators later claimed that Gainsborough used brushes six feet long. When painting a landscape, he did not venture outside, but constructed a little model in his parlour. It shocks us, impressed by the moral imperative to paint nature *en plein air*, but Gainsborough

would place cork and coal for his foregrounds & make middle grounds of sand and clay, bush-

es of mosses & lichens, & set up distant woods of broccoli.

Out of this bizarre — even tawdry — practice, he produced some of the most poetic paintings imaginable. He responded rapturously to the idea of nature, not some observed truth. (It has been remarked that you can tell from Constable's skies what the weather will be like in six hours' time, whereas with Gainsborough it's impossible to say whether he intends a sunset or a sunrise.)

Like his contemporary Fragonard, he dissolves the world into a fantastic surface, subduing its people into a subjective place of feathery brushstrokes and trees like bath foam. Gainsborough has an important place in British art: from him springs a line of visionaries whose eyes were directed inwards, from Samuel Palmer to Edward Burne-Jones and beyond. To some degree they painted what they saw when they closed their eyes.

One of the surprises of reading about Gainsborough, and even more when reading his wonderful letters, is how very far he was from a mannered exquisite. He was born in Sudbury, Suffolk in 1727, and his family, though poor and prone to disaster, encouraged ambition. (One brother was a pioneer of steam power.) Thomas showed an early

talent for art, and went to London, aged just 13. There he came into contact with some of the great painters of the day, including Hogarth and Francis Hayman, just at the moment when French engravers and artists were bringing a new degree of elegance to British art. Much later, when George III commissioned 'The Mall in St James's Park' (1783) and intelligently said that for this overwhelming idyll, 'he did not desire the high finish of Watteau, but a sketchy picture', Gainsborough knew precisely what he meant.

Gainsborough's life in London was, clearly, riotous, and he was making a good name for himself. So it's puzzling why, in 1748, he moved back to the stolid backwater of Sudbury, with fewer patrons and possibilities. The reason, perhaps, was his marriage in 1746. The 18-year-old Margaret Burr was





THE BUDGEAN ART LIBRARY / GETTY IMAGES

*Far left: Gainsborough's portrait of his son-in-law, Johann Christian Fischer.
Centre: Self-portrait, with his wife Margaret.
Above: Ann Ford (later Mrs Philip Thicknesse)*

what Jane Austen's *Emma* much later fantasises about her friend Harriet being — the illegitimate daughter of a great duke. She had the respectable sum of £200 a year settled on her; and she was also, to say the least, a strong character. Did she balance the greater opportunities in London against the greater temptations for a wastrel like Gainsborough?

Somehow, Gainsborough managed to find more patrons and more debauchery in Suffolk, painting the extraordinary unfinished double portrait 'Mr and Mrs Andrews', which boasts about the extent of land ownership. Hamilton suggests that it was handed over unfinished by the hot-headed painter because the sitters balked at some obscene imagery for Mrs Andrews's lap. The painting was tucked away and not seen widely until the 1927.

At this time he also met a wild but important figure, Philip Thicknesse, who by the end of his life was claiming credit for 'discovering' Gainsborough. Thicknesse drew the painter away from Sudbury and

When painting a landscape, he didn't venture outdoors, but constructed model woods out of broccoli

encouraged him to move to Bath, where the fashionable world could at least view his work. Certainly Gainsborough's portrait of Thicknesse's future wife Ann Ford drew a lot of attention. When Mrs Delaney saw this magnificent portrait, one of the first that Gainsborough painted on his arrival in Bath, she called it 'a most extraordinary figure, handsome and bold; but I should be

very sorry to have any one I loved set forth in such a manner'.

During his time in Bath, Gainsborough established himself as a rival to the great Sir Joshua Reynolds, and was decidedly more amusing company. His painting developed from a doll-like provincial manner to the fluid flurries of his mature style. By the time he moved to London, in 1774, he was immensely famous. Unlike Reynolds, he saw his portrait practice as embedded in contemporary life. His element of fantasy did not depend on getting his sitters to pose sacrificing to the Graces, or asking their children to dress up as Henry VIII, as Reynolds did. In a famous letter to a dissatisfied client, he writes: 'Nothing can be more absurd than the foolish custom of painters dressing people like scaramouches, and expecting the likeness to appear.'

Gainsborough painted his people as they dreamt of appearing, without meaningless flattery; he was very funny about the size of Mrs Siddons's nose, but often saw his sitters as genuinely beautiful, even (to an embarrassing degree) in the case of the royal family. The King was obliged to make Reynolds his Painter in Ordinary, but he and the Queen loved Gainsborough best — and no wonder. His paintings of them are miracles of unobtrusive

sympathy, none more than the astonishing set of 15 small portraits of the royal family, of unprecedented simplicity and grace. They include posthumous portraits, one of a very dreamlike quality. The Queen broke down in public when she saw them.

Hamilton is a first-rate art historian, who has written an excellent life of Turner and a superlative book about the 19th-century art industry, *A Strange Business*. Writing vividly about Gainsborough's two portraits of a scandalous pair called Ligonier (the wife slept with her husband's groom), he says: 'No wonder the horse looks as if he knows it all: he did.' He gives us deft explanations of mysterious artistic effects — Gainsborough's use of ground glass in the medium, how he might have learnt about it, and what it does to the surface. But the question of money is Hamilton's core expertise: how much Gainsborough earned and how much of it went on necessary display, such as grand houses in Bath and Pall Mall. And fascinating it is, too.

I would have welcomed a little more about Gainsborough's contemporaries. He was an unusual painter, but a very collegiate one, and he worked in a social milieu of borrowing and mutual influence. Some of those minor painters whom he must have looked at — Bartholomew Dandridge at the beginning, John Hamilton Mortimer towards the end — would have been interesting to have followed up. And it's surprising to be told that on Gainsborough's triumphant return to London 'Francis Hayman and Johan Zoffany were at work', as if they were in their prime. By 1774, Hayman had been a busted flush for years, and was almost certainly no longer painting.

Hamilton is very good, though, on the human side. The complicated story of Gainsborough's own marriage, and his daughter Mary's disastrous one to the celebrated oboist Johann Christian Fischer, is absorbingly told. The portrait of Fischer is one of the great masterpieces, and, though he can never have been paid anything for it, Gainsborough kept it around for years. Presumably everyone knew what Fischer looked like, and its value as an advertisement for Gainsborough's skill in capturing a likeness trumped any pain it may have given Mary.

Best of all is a very funny chapter about Gainsborough's ludicrous obsession with music, and his absurd habit of turning up at the houses of famous musicians and offering them huge sums of money for their lutes, violas da gamba or (in the case of Fischer) his oboe. Once acquired, they proved disappointingly hard to master. 'Probably his ear was too delicate to bear the disagreeable sounds which necessarily attend the first beginnings on a wind instrument.'

Gainsborough is one of the most lovable of great artists, and his personality shines through. This is an enjoyable biography by a writer who understands him.

A clash of creeds

Brian Martin

Modern Gods

by Nick Laird

Fourth Estate, £12.99, pp. 308

This is a very modern novel. Terrorist atrocity sits side by side with the familiar and the mundane. Where better for this to happen than in Northern Ireland? At the Day's End pub 'two eejits in Halloween masks' enter the bar; 'Trick or treat,' they shout. 'Fut-fut-fut-fut went the gun.' A woman screams, 'then a very fast piece of metal entered the side of her head and she stopped'.

Throughout the first half of the book, the horror of the pub massacre alternates with the narration of an ordinary family's home life. The blood-curdling incident impinges drastically on the lives of the family's two daughters: Alison, who lives with her parents and is bringing up children from her failed marriage; and Liz, a successful academic in America, on her way to make a TV film about a new religion that has emerged in an island off Papua New Guinea called New Ulster. A dramatic contrast is established between the old and the new Ulsters. In the second half of the novel that recounts Liz's experiences in Melanesia, Nick Laird shows that in many ways there is not much difference between the two.

Both societies are subject to problems engendered by religion, the 'prods and the RCs' in Ireland, and the cargo cult religion of the charismatic apostate Belef and her clash with evangelical missionary Christianity in New Ulster. Laird explores the themes of violence caused by the confrontations of rival creeds, and the fierce tribalism, some members 'press-ganged into the caste', that such loyalties create.

Simultaneously, Laird has wider reflections on the nature of time — 'galactic time, nightmare, deep time, the time of stars,



'I'd like the sweet smell of success, tempered by a sour note of regret.'

time of the moon.' Yet he never loses sight of the prosaic, the real ordinary moment. That makes him consider, with some predictability, the possibility of redemption for the extremist who regrets his past. Yet there is no primrose path to forgiveness.

A particular appeal of Laird's writing is his poetic imagination; a power pylon standing 'with its arms upraised like St Kevin's, in perpetual ache'; Liz's attempt to join in a native dance, which reduces her to bobbing up and down 'in the traditional Northern Irish manner like a cork or an aunt at a wedding'. These images delight and many combine with his sense of humour. At her second wedding, Alison and her new bridegroom appear like 'a couple of insects coming down the aisle', while the sweaty best man has a face 'the colour of cooked gammon'.

The conclusion of *Modern Gods* is uncompromising. Whether it is Ulster or New Ulster, the ancient law prevails, 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'.

Wool, wheat and wet weather

Dominic Green

The Last Wolf: The Hidden Springs of Englishness

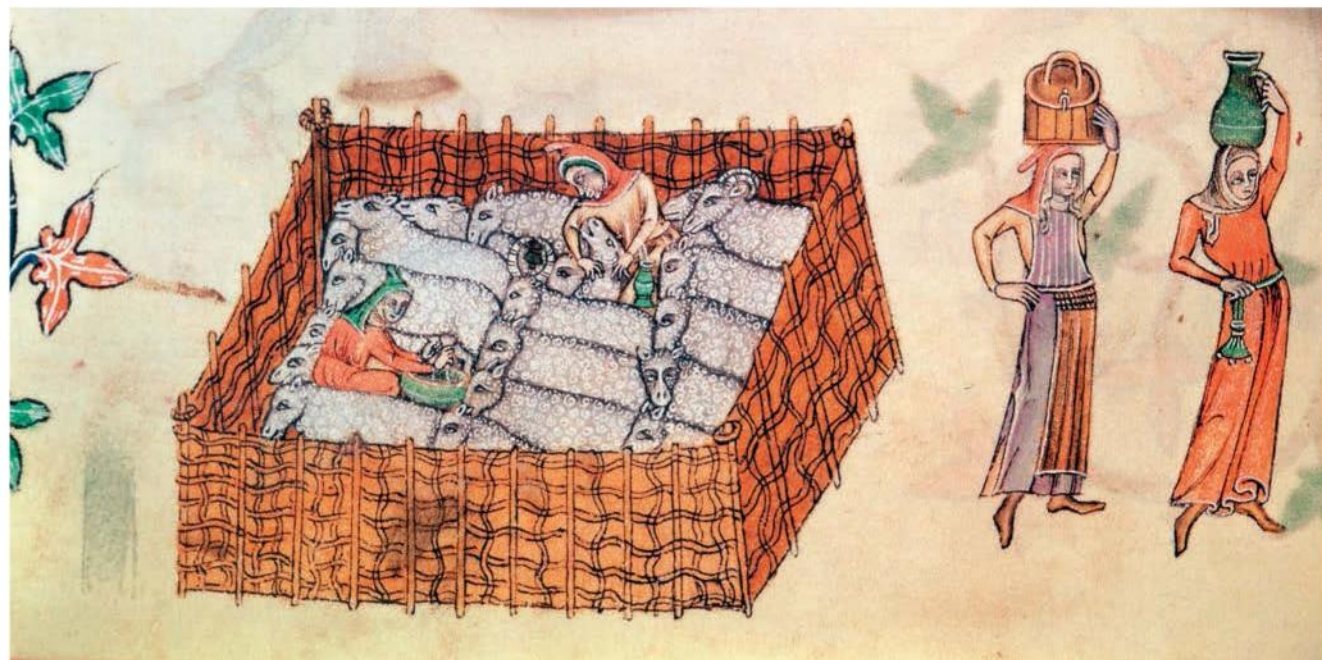
by Robert Winder

Little, Brown, £20, pp. 471

Englishness is big business in the nation of shopkeepers, and not just in politics and tourism. In literature, the gypsy scholars of Clan Macfarlane range freely across the hills and lexicons in search of old England, the dying and undead. This paperchase confirms that a change in the self-image of the English is afoot too. For centuries, the English poured into their cities. Now, they are trickling back out to the countryside. London excites precisely because it is another country, from a future that at least 54.8 per cent of the English prefer not to live in. But what does the returnee know of England who only London knows?

In 1997, Little, Brown published Clive Aslet's *Anyone for England?* as 'A Search for English Identity'. Twenty years on, the same publisher gives us Robert Winder's *The Last Wolf*, with a subtitle promising a search both complete and elusive: 'The Hidden Springs of Englishness.' For Winder, the erstwhile literary editor of the erstwhile *Independent*, the springs of Englishness are environmental and medieval.

Geography is history, Montesquieu argued in *L'esprit des lois* (1748). The warm Gulf Stream and inclement rain shaped English agriculture and settlement. The rain fed the grass and the wheat. The wheat and the rain combined with the gist,



Sheep being milked in a pen. (From the Luttrell Psalter, English School, 14th century)

as the Anglo-Saxons called yeast, to make cakes and ale. The grass fed the sheep, and the sheep, apart from feeding the shepherds, fattened the wool dealers. Add coal, and Winder can reduce Englishness to a 'playful equation': $E = cw^4$ (Englishness = coal x wool, wheat and wet weather).

By his own argument, Winder should subtract a fifth 'w', the wolf. The ovine economy of the Middle Ages required 'a tamed terrain, scoured of exciting wild animals'. In 1281, Edward I commissioned Peter 'The Mighty Hunter' Corbet to clear the last wolves from England's forests.

The whirring creak of the watermill was as integral to the English scene as birdsong or the bleating of lambs

By 1290, Peter had earned his nickname and England could become an 'enormous sheep estate'.

In the same year, Edward I expelled England's 'Jewish financiers' along, we must presume, with their Jewish financier wives and children. Winder finds this murder and expropriation a bit 'dismaying', like rain at a village fete, and interprets it as a form of proto-Brexit. But the extirpation of the wolves and the Jews are linked, and neither have much to do with Brexit. The Anglo-Norman economy was built with loans from 'Jewish financiers'. Debt and wolves were the two obstacles to its further growth. Shakespeare, a son of the wool trade, calls Shylock a wolf.

The Last Wolf is an engaging ramble through the wool towns and open ranges of medieval England. The sheep economy

made 'a love of the outdoors', a 'preoccupation with the weather' and 'a national love of dogs' all seem 'stereotypically English' and 'innate'. Medieval England had 'more mills than churches', and 'the whirring creak of the watermill' was as 'integral to the English scene as birdsong or the bleating of lambs'. And did the English preference for soft white bread inspire the 'serrated edge' of the English bread knife?

These springs are as much neglected as hidden. Under the Tudors and Stuarts, another 'w' and another 'e' — salt water and enclosures — profoundly changed the equation of English commercial life, and the face of the landscape too. The wool trade had always been a sea trade, and the Black Death, by clearing more land for sheep, accelerated the formation of giant ranges and made the surviving sheep magnates more powerful. But our 'stereotypically English' hedgerows and urban habitats are the legacies of land enclosures, and the luxurious classical pastoral of the Georgians — beef and claret, not lamb and beer — rested on Atlantic and Indian commerce.

Winder rightly emphasises that the precociously commercial life of medieval England fostered the change from the woollen world to the wooden world of maritime empire. But he does not address the two most important developments of all: the transition from Latin and Old English to the hybrid tongue of Langland, Chaucer and the Reformation. The Protestant revolt turned England's sailors and businessmen towards the Atlantic, crystallised the English language, and created the trifecta of national identity: land, language and a

national religion. As a 'Jew made in England' — not, unfortunately, by financiers — I would argue that this trinity not only created the richness and density of Englishness, but also its exclusivity.

The Last Wolf is a good yarn, but not all of the springs of Englishness come from the old England of the shepherds. When Disraeli identified 'two nations' among the products of modern Englishness, he might have added another two nations — the England of before and that of after the Reformation.

The German Lion of Africa

Allan Mallinson

African Kaiser: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Great War in Africa, 1914–1918

by Robert Gaudi

Hurst, £20, pp. 436

What's going on with book reviews? Here is the Pulitzer prizewinning (for 'criticism') Michael Dirda in the *Washington Post*, on this book's cover:

Let me say straight out that if all military histories were as thrilling and well written as Robert Gaudi's *African Kaiser*, I might give up reading fiction and literary biography... Gaudi writes with the flair of a latter-day Macaulay. He sets his scenes carefully and describes naval and military action like a novelist.

Leaving aside the extraordinary comparison



General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in 1917

with Macaulay for the moment, most naval and military novels that I've read get the historical detail right. Robert Gaudi's book is so error-strewn that it would fail to qualify even as historical fiction.

His subject is a promising one. *Oberstleutnant* (later *Generalmajor*) Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck was sent to German East Africa (now part of Tanzania) just before the outbreak of the first world war to take command of the *Schutztruppe* — defence forces — comprising German officers, NCOs and African levies — 'askaris' ('soldiers', from the Arabic). In November 1914, Lettow and his men gave a bloody nose to a scratch expeditionary force sent from India, and then for the next four years proceeded to lead all comers — British, South African and Portuguese — a merry dance until ordered by Berlin to surrender after the Armistice in 1918. Lettow and his 200-odd officers and NCOs, as an 'undefeated army' (which never numbered more than 11,000, including camp-followers), were accorded the privilege of parading along the *Unter den Linden* the following year.

Without intending to, he therefore served the myth of the 'stab in the back' — the notion that the German army had not been defeated (specifically in France) but prevented from continuing the war because of unpatriotic, socialist defeatism at home.

the army almost preordained. Possibly lacking the financial means for a smart regiment at home, he became something of a colonial soldier, taking part in the suppression of the Boxer rebellion in China, where his Prussian military sensibilities were offended by fighting against guerrillas, which he considered corrosive of discipline.

Dealing with the insurrections in German south-west Africa subsequently did nothing to change his opinion. He qualified for the *Grosser Generalstab*, however, and in 1909 took command of a battalion of marines — again, not the most prestigious of appointments, even during the time of the 'Dreadnought Race'. Only in retrospect could his appointment to command the rag, tag and bobtail force in German East Africa be seen as a plum one.

His story has often been told, and Gaudi — an American 'freelance writer and historian' — appears to have consulted only these secondary sources, so reveals nothing new. Furthermore, he frequently misunderstands the sources and repeats their errors.

He is certainly not *au fait* with military detail. Trivial though it is, to read of a 'major's pips on his collar' is not reassuring. Worse is to read that 'the Loyal North Lancs [were] raised from white European residents of India'. The 'Loyal North Lancs' feature large in the story, but the author seems not to have twigged that 'Lancs' is not a place

The myth was a powerful element in the rise of Hitler, though Lettow himself was not seduced by either the myth or by Hitler's blandishments. The story goes that in 1935 he was offered the ambassadorship in London, where he was held in grudging regard, but 'declined with frigid hauteur' and that after his death in 1964, at the age of 93, one of his biographers asked Lettow's nephew if it were true that *der Löwe von Afrika* had told Hitler 'to go fuck himself'. The nephew said, 'I don't think he put it that politely.' After the war his standing as 'a good German' helped give respectability to the nascent Bundeswehr, which named three barracks after him.

Lettow was never a rising star, however. It was more a case of time and circumstance. His was the usual Junker background, entry into

in India, or a white residents' club, but the abbreviation for 'Lancashire'. The 2nd Loyals, whose depot was in Preston, were a regular army battalion stationed in India. Besides the risibility, the significance of their being the sole regular British battalion in the force is thereby lost. Likewise, the soldiers of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, whose maharajah put his troops at the service of the King in 1914, and whose Kashmir Rifles fought alongside the Loyals, would have been surprised to find themselves referred to as 'Gurkha mercenaries'. Gaudi has confused Kashmir with Nepal.

His grasp of terminology is similarly amateurish. He writes of British 'battleships' in the Rufigi delta, 'cables from the First Sea Lord' and radio signals sent 'in the all-clear'. He is equally confused about the mechanics of operations, writing at one point about officers 'anxious over the embarkation [sic] of 8,000 on a hostile shore' which he believes is 'logistics'. And so it goes on.

These are tiresome errors which might not disqualify the book from being 'thrilling', even if they are indicative of its over-

Throughout the first world war, Lettow led all comers a merry dance in East Africa

all historical unreliability, but there are worse faults. One is the treatment of Major-General Arthur Aitken, commander of 'Expeditionary Force B'. Gaudi describes him as 'a soft, portly man' (although photographs suggest rather the opposite): 'Aitken had served with the British Army in India for the previous 35 years, his record blameless but entirely undistinguished.' He was promoted, says Gaudi, though he cites no evidence, 'perhaps because of his powerfully connected brother... the famous press mogul Lord Beaverbrook, friend of Winston Churchill's and well-connected in Parliament'.

Just how Sir Max Aitken, as he then was, is supposed to have exerted influence on the Commander-in-Chief India is not explained. While Arthur Aitken undoubtedly underestimated his enemy, resulting in the bloody nose at Tanga, it would have been more profitable to try to analyse why he underestimated them, rather than suggesting merely that reading a novel as his ship neared the coast indicated stupidity. Wolfe read poetry before Quebec, and Eisenhower read westerns before D-Day. Sangfroid is a virtue, though it does of course have to be followed by success.

And in any case Aitken was not Sir Max's brother. The author has confused him with Arthur Noble Aitken, captain in the RAMC with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France. It is not an easy mistake to make, unless you take it for granted from a secondary source. The Reverend William Aitken

married Miss Jane Noble in 1867. General Arthur Edward Aitken was born in 1861 (Arthur Noble Aitken in 1883).

Is there any point in reading on — perhaps for the ‘flair of a latter-day Macaulay’? But Macaulay would never have begun a sentence ‘For starters’; or written ‘fished out of the drink’; or ‘the tropical sun, always overhead, blazed down...’ Nor would he have pluralised Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War*, or translated *Erinnerungen* as ‘campaigns’.

Michael Dirda would have done better to read *The African Queen*.

A feminist trailblazer

Jane Ridley

Miss Muriel Matters: The Fearless Suffragist Who Fought for Equality

by Robert Wainwright

Allen & Unwin, £18.99, pp. 376

On the evening of 28 October 1908, two unremarkable middle-class women wearing heavy overcoats gained admission to the Ladies’ Gallery, high above the chamber in the House of Commons. Suffragettes had previously hit the headlines by chaining themselves to the railings at 10 Downing Street and, emboldened by this success, the leaders of the women’s movement planned an even more outrageous demonstration. The Ladies’ Gallery was surrounded by a metal grille, and this had huge significance for the suffragettes, as it symbolised their exclusion from the patriarchal political system. The plot was for two of them to chain themselves to the hated grille. One of the women chosen for the job was an Australian named Muriel Matters.

Muriel wore a thick leather belt round her waist and carried chains beneath her coat. At 8.30 p.m. she rushed forward, stripped off her coat and chained herself to the grille with a padlock. She then stood up and made a loud speech demanding the vote for women. Soon policemen and attendants arrived and, after a scuffle, she was removed, still attached to her panel of the grille. She was taken to a committee room, and the chains were filed off. To her disappointment, she was not arrested. She immediately joined the throng of women who were demonstrating in St Stephen’s Hall. Here she did contrive to get herself arrested for disorderly behaviour. She refused to pay the fine and was sentenced to imprisonment in Holloway for a month.

With a name like Muriel Matters (her real name), she was almost born to become a celebrity. She grew up in South Australia, her grandparents having emigrated from Plymouth. In Adelaide she attended high school, and she was trained in elocution by the same

man who taught Lionel Logue, the hero of the film *The King’s Speech*. Small, with abundant fair hair and wide-apart eyes, Muriel had a natural stage presence, and she became a performer, giving recitals and sometimes acting. She claimed she was converted to feminism by Ibsen’s play *The Doll’s House*, but the fact of the matter was that Adelaide blazed a trail in women’s rights. South Australia was the first Australian state to give women the vote in 1894, and in 1902 women got the vote to the federal Parliament.

Muriel came to England in 1905, aged 28, and joined the fight for women’s suffrage. In 1907 the militant Women’s Social and Political Union split over Mrs Pankhurst’s autocratic leadership, and Charlotte Despard broke away and formed the democratic Women’s Freedom League (the suffragettes were not good at thinking of snappy titles). Muriel followed Despard into the WFL, and she became their star speaker.

Travelling in a caravan drawn by a horse called Asquith (after the stubbornly anti-suffragist Prime Minister), Muriel toured the south of England, stopping to make speeches wherever she went, cheerfully giving as good as she got to the men who heckled her. She was fearless. After chaining herself to the grille, her next stunt was even more dare-devil: she flew over Westminster in an airship on the day of the opening of Parliament in 1909, throwing out leaflets for ‘Votes for Women’. Unfortunately the wind blew them off course, and she flew far too high for her megaphone to be audible.

Japanese Drawing

The little girl with black hair who
might be around seven, sitting
opposite on the train, is leaning
her head on the shoulder and arm

of a person who is no more
than twenty herself and can’t be
her mother. A sister then, a
hand curled on one knee holding

a pair of glasses made to fit
the face of the child at rest against
safe stability, that small face
with closed eyes, but an expression

so open and clear, at ease,
serenely untroubled, peaceful
as a pencil sketch in soft lines,
a loveliness plain as water.

—Roy Kelly

Muriel Matters went on to marry an American dentist in 1914. By then she had broken with the militant wing of the suffrage movement; she realised that terrorist tactics of violence were counterproductive, giving the anti-suffragists good reason for refusing the vote. She was a pacifist in the Great War, and in 1916 she trained with Maria Montessori, working with Sylvia Pankhurst to help children in the East End of London.

When she died in Hastings in 1969 Matters left few papers, and Robert Wainwright has managed to reconstruct her career largely from suffrage publications and digitised newspapers. He succeeds marvellously in bringing to life a woman who until recently was little more than a name in the history of the suffragette movement. Relying so heavily on newspapers means, however, that we get a lot of Muriel’s speeches, but very few of her private reflections or letters.

Reading this book reminded me of the 2015 film *Suffragette*. As in that film, the protagonist’s heroism is accepted unconditionally. No one today would deny that the women’s cause was right, but that doesn’t mean that everyone who disagreed with it at the time should be disregarded. Wainwright makes no attempt to understand the political class of Edwardian England, dismissing them as ‘trussed-up, pompous men’ making tedious speeches. The result is a one-sided story decidedly lacking in nuance.



Aubrey Beardsley's 'The Climax' — an illustration for Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*

Flights of fancy

Tibor Fischer

Levitation: The Science, Myth and Magic of Suspension

by Peter Adey

Reaktion, £20, pp. 293

Levitation. We all know what it is: the 'disregard for gravity', as Peter Adey puts it in his new book, or as the dust jacket states, 'the long-standing belief that we could float relatively unaided'. The cover of *Levitation* has an elegant lady in flowing robes apparently hovering in a bubble over New York. Who could resist a good read about a subject like that? The catch lies in the subtitle: 'The Science, Myth and Magic of Suspension.' Suspension: we all know what that is, and it's not levitation.

The excitement of levitation clearly attracted Adey and his editor, but when it

came to knocking out the copy, it was evidently impossible to produce an entire book. So what Adey has done is to move the goalposts so far that the whole world can have a tap-in; he has embraced elevation in its entirety.

So we get elevation whether it's tight-rope walking, anchorites atop pillars, saints ascending, fakirs clambering up magic ropes, ballerinas leaping, ballooning, astronauts floating in space, giddy poets and even drones.

It's a definition so loose you wonder if a chapter on the high jump is coming (and there is a name check for the basketball star Michael Jordan and his famous 'hang time', which Adey does, with a straight face, classify as levitation).

This open-door policy results in a stimulating mish-mash of information. Houdini, Kafka, Hobbes, Dali, Rabelais, the tutu, magic carpets and *Ghostbusters* are rarely lumped together. A lot of honest graft has

gone into gathering all these elements and Adey does have a sophistic skill in striving to weave them all together: 'even birth has been viewed as an event of levitation' (admittedly by a lesser Freudian).

There are some entertaining passages. Allen Ginsberg, for example, chanting in the hope of levitating the Pentagon during a Vietnam war protest in Washington in 1967; Ginsberg didn't succeed, and I think Adey missed a trick here in not mentioning the Yippies' protest at the New York Stock Exchange where they threw down dollar bills at the brokers, who greedily snapped them up. Surely reverse levitation?

Adey also draws on Norman Mailer, who was present during the attempted levitation of the Pentagon, and his rambling reflections on the police helicopters over-

Rarely do we find Hobbes, Dali, Kafka, the tutu, magic carpets and Ghostbusters all lumped together

head (it was his *Armies of the Night* phase). As you would expect from someone who has written books on air and aerial life, Adey is ready with a witty quote from the poet Paul Farley, branding a police helicopter 'the devil's hairdryer'. Is it churlish of me to point out that helicopters, however inspiring to novelists or poets, aren't levitation?

Adey often wanders even further from the given title with some quite fascinating digressions, such as the question of outer space copyright law in relation to the Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield's recording of David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' on the International Space Station. Fascinating, but not levitation.

The artist Takis and his claim to have 'sent the first man into space' six months before Yuri Gagarin by giving a beat poet a magnetic lift in Paris (only a few inches) was news to me. Arthur Koestler's ludicrous experiments in levitation weren't.

I was disappointed that while the cinematic version of Magneto of the X-Men gets his due, Marvel's much-underrated supervillain the Wizard (the leader of the Frightful Four) and his anti-gravity discs aren't mentioned. Similarly one of my favourite paintings, Egon Schiele's 'Levitation', is missing.

I worry, however, when I see words like 'discourse', 'rhizome', 'male gaze', 'the other' and 'gender politics'. These are the slumped clichés of contemporary academic life. Adey is a professor at Royal Holloway. For all the current mania for diversity, the humanities faculties at British universities display a depressing homogeneity of thought, a uniformity of cant, an enslavement to a handful of mountebanks who used to teach at Paris VIII.

Adey isn't the worst offender I've come

across. His prose is mainly lucid, but he does occasionally stretch his arguments to absurdity or obscurity:

The levitator is really quite other. There are moments when we might see levitation as a product of pernicious and even racist discourse and tensions that are somehow absorbed and turned back upon the very subject of its discourse.

What?

This is one of the problems that academics outside the sciences face: that maybe there's nothing new to be said on a subject, and it's dishonest to pretend there is.

The illustrations in the book are fantastic, a wonderful range of artworks, paintings, photos, from music-hall posters to Chagall. Sadly, I couldn't help feeling that *Levitation* would have been better with more pictures and less text.

Holidays with Hitler

Nigel Jones

Travellers in the Third Reich: The Rise of Fascism Through the Eyes of Everyday People

by Julia Boyd

Elliott & Thompson, £20, pp. 456

The Trial of Adolf Hitler: The Beer Hall Putsch and the Rise of Nazi Germany

by David King

Macmillan, £20, pp. 455

We don't usually think of Hitler's hated henchman Heinrich Himmler, architect of the Holocaust of European Jewry, as a comic turn, but the diary of Admiral Sir Barry Domville, a former chief of British Naval Intelligence and fanatical admirer of Nazi Germany, proves otherwise.

Domville's description of his visit to Himmler's 'hunting box' high in the Bavarian Alps in 1935, reproduced in Julia Boyd's fascinating book, is a treasury of thigh-slapping humour, including hearing Himmler wake him at 3.20 a.m. with his rendition of 'God Save the King'; complaints about the Reichsführer's primitive 'bog' — a deep hole in the ground; and finishing with a 'regular Bavarian evening... much leaping, crying and slapping of bums, soles of feet, thighs etc. and a pretence of lifting the girls' skirts, reminiscent of Highland reels'. 'HH', Domville concludes, was 'very charming'.

No less droll is the eyewitness account by Kay Smith, an American diplomat's wife, who saw that inveterate show-off Hermann Goering — second only to Hitler in the Reich's heirarchy — demonstrate his affinity with his pet lion Augie by letting the animal lick his face before an audience of visiting VIPs. Then the poor creature, star-

tled by an aide's sudden laugh, 'let loose a flood of yellow urine all over [Goering's] snow white uniform... the lion was led away... we all laughed pleasantly'.

Such surreal scenes pepper Boyd's deep trawl of travellers' tales from the scores of visitors she quotes who were drawn to the 'new Germany' in the 1930s. The tourists fell into three groups: most were simply curious to discover for themselves what the much vaunted or reviled regime was really like; some were enthusiasts who saw nothing but good in the Hitlerian state, determinedly closing their eyes to its obviously sinister side; and others were committed anti-Nazis, who came to confirm their loathing of a society hell-bent on indoctrination, racial persecution and war.

Few minds were changed by their visits. Hitler fans like Domville, the dementedly Führer-struck Unity Mitford, and famous sympathisers such as the American aviator Charles Lindbergh, the Norwegian Nobel literature laureate Knut Hamsun, and the British nature writer Henry Williamson, came away convinced that the Führer was creating a utopia peopled by happy and healthy youngsters marching down an autobahn towards a radiant future.

The only pro-Nazi cited by Boyd who was 'turned' by the reality of his experience was the verbose American novelist Thomas Wolfe. The scales dropped from his eyes when, leaving Germany, he saw a Jew stripped of all he possessed by a bullying Nazi official at the frontier.

What is most striking in Boyd's examples, though, is the willing suspension of doubts even when visitors faced such savage atrocities as Kristallnacht, the brutal burning and trashing of Jewish synagogues, homes and stores; or allowed themselves to believe that the contented and well-fed inmates of Dachau concentration camp they were shown were real prisoners instead of the SS guards in disguise that they actually were. Such sights were the Potemkin villages of Nazi Germany: shop windows giving an

entirely false picture to gullible outsiders of the true house of horrors within.

An enduring mystery still stubbornly clinging to Hitler, despite the reams of studies devoted to him, is just how this shabby back-street guttersnipe magicked himself within a decade into the God-like dictator of a superstate, worshipped alike by the overwhelming majority of Germans and the many bedazzled foreigners Boyd has found.

Part of the answer to the puzzle is provided by David King's vivid account of the 1923 Munich beer hall putsch — Hitler's farcically abortive attempt to seize power by violence ten years before he won it legally. The first part of King's book is a fast-moving narrative of the putsch itself, while the second is a detailed account of Hitler's subsequent trial for treason, based on

How could tourists not have seen that the well-fed inmates of Dachau were really SS guards in disguise?

Bavarian court records hitherto somewhat neglected by historians.

Aided by a lenient judge, Hitler transformed the trial into a performance with himself as the star. Turning the case against him inside out, he became the prosecutor lambasting the real traitors, the politicians who he claimed had betrayed the Fatherland. By successfully portraying his botched putsch as a blood sacrifice, and himself as martyred hero, Hitler grabbed national and international attention and set the scene for his rapid ascent.

Both these books offer startling insights into aspects of Hitler and Nazism that have previously been under-reported. The subtleties of both are misleading — fascism and Nazism being different beasts, and the rise of Nazi Germany coming more than ten years after Hitler's treason trial. But that does not detract from their value in refreshing the hackneyed and rather dusty history of the astounding Hitler phenomenon.





The formidable Thelma Holt (right) with Vanessa Redgrave in 1987

Watching from the wings Sarah Crompton

Get Me the Urgent Biscuits: An Assistant's Adventures in Theatreland

by *Sweetpea Slight*
Orion, £14.99, pp. 255

The story of Sweetpea Slight is a footnote to a footnote in the annals of British theatre. Even her name suggests it — a gentle, fragrant vanishing off the bottom of the page. In fact, it isn't even her real name (which is Jane), but one given her by her formidable boss, the theatre producer Thelma Holt. She spotted her as a gangly, impressionable 18-year-old on an internship at the Theatre of Comedy in 1984, deflected her from her plan to become an actor and swept her into the role of factotum, where she remained for 20 years.

The moniker caused one moment of confusion, when it emerged that Dustin Hoffman, in London to play Shylock in Peter Hall's production of *The Merchant of Venice*,

produced by Holt, answered to the same. 'It transpired that this had been his nickname since babyhood because he used to crawl up everything. So this was how Dustin and I bonded and became the two Sweetpeas.'

It's a nice anecdote, but it reveals the problem with the book. Whether thanks to her psychology or discretion, Slight never reveals much about the people who swim around her. On the next page, she describes Hoffman as 'very likeable and unstarry' and adds: 'I felt privileged to watch him at work.' It's not really earth-shattering.

Throughout the book certain characters — Alan Rickman, Fiona Shaw, Helen Mirren — emerge with grace and compassion, and others — including the unnamed actor who fondled Slight's breasts while his wife was in the outer office — make a less attractive appearance on her stage. We learn that Vanessa Redgrave chopped up a £1,500 wig in a bid to find her character and filled a bath with snakeskin shoes in an attempt to make her own costume, but we don't understand any more about her craft than we did when we started reading.

This lack of insight is compounded by

the fact that all too often Slight is literally on the sidelines, missing the real action. When Holt and Hall took productions on a ground-breaking Russian tour, Slight never got further than Gatwick airport. She may have had to deal with their problems by phone, but it's not quite the same as hiding in a ditch to avoid the KGB and get to a forbidden party — which is what Holt was up to at the time.

Slight describes the complications of her personal life, as she struggles to overcome an innocent and unconventional upbringing in Devon and comes to terms with being gay. Yet once again her reticence is her undoing; she fades out of her own story at the end, simply leaving Holt when her disillusion with the theatre set in: 'It seemed that almost overnight the magic grew legs and arms and ran away screaming.'

What just about holds the interest is the way Sweet's descriptions of theatre in the 1980s and 1990s seems as ancient at just 30 years' distance as the lost city of Atlantis. This is a world before computers and

There's something undoubtedly creepy about the way Thelma Holt takes over Sweetpea Slight's life

mobile phones, where a girl can spend a day photocopying contracts; where actors drink in the Green Room during a performance; where Holt can dismiss her assistant's tentative exploration of her sexuality with the damning: 'It's just a phase, darling.'

The book is dedicated to Holt, and it's clear that Slight still admires her. But the picture that emerges is equivocal. However much Slight accepts it, there's something undoubtedly creepy about the way Holt takes over her life, giving her hand-me-down clothes to wear and even insisting they share a double bed to save money. Although her eccentricity is well documented — she once short-sightedly ate cat food for breakfast and went to a premiere having forgotten to put her dress on beneath her coat — her fabled wit seems to consist of the liberal use of the 'c' word.

She emerges as a sacred monster, cajoling and bullying all around her in her determination to bring the very best of international theatre to Britain, with only the consolation of neat vodka and shortbread biscuits to see her through. 'The only way to survive in this profession without becoming a manic depressive is to exercise huge amounts of self-deception,' Slight quotes Holt as telling her, adding 'Thelma's ability to delude herself was masterful and her ego robust enough to accommodate almost anything.'

It's just a shame the book provides so few revealing examples of the genius that self-delusion produced.

The violence of poverty

Kate Webb

A State of Freedom

by Neel Mukherjee

Chatto, £16.99, pp. 275

Neel Mukherjee has had a two-handed literary career, working as a reviewer of other people's novels and writing his own. In 2014, his second novel, *The Lives of Others*, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. His latest book is a state-of-the-globalised-nation novel which gives human particularity to those deadened concepts we pass around such as migration, inequality and neoliberalism.

A State of Freedom breaks into five chapters, each telling the story of a distinct individual in India, whose connection to the others is only fully revealed in the final pages. Mukherjee has observed wryly that due to stereotypical ideas about the Indian novel, whatever their formal properties, his fictions tend to be read as family sagas. Perhaps with this in mind, the relationships in *A State of Freedom* are more often horizontal than generational and the stories, taking place across the country, emphasise wildly different fortunes and experience.

Confounding western preconceptions, one of Mukherjee's protagonists, a cook-book writer manqué, asserts that there is no such thing as Indian food (the cuisine varies tremendously between states and cultures, something Mukherjee shows in mouth-watering detail), and in his novel there is no exemplary character: everyone's perspective is partial and fragmented, and the ability to read the lives of others is less a product of education than a function of power. So the beggars, servants and manual labourers who appear ghost-like and inscrutable to the wealthy émigré visitors of the first two chapters, glimpsed only in their 'periphery of vision', emerge subsequently from this state of illegibility into fully realised human beings, each with their own chapter, context and rationale.

Mukherjee begins with a man undone by India, a returnee after years away in America, now 'broken down' by an event made all the more horrific for seeming inexplicable. The unnamed man, bursting with pride but sensing he is 'no longer a proper Indian', has brought his young son in the back of a chauffeur-driven car to the Taj Mahal. But the American boy is too young to appreciate his father's stories about emperors banqueting under white moonlight, and bewildered by an onslaught of beggars and amputees from whom his father tries to shield the stunned child.

This brief sketch opens the novel like a sharp slap, alerting the reader to how proclamations of India's dizzying too-muchness — hoardings in multiple languages and styles

make the father think, 'how unsettled their orthography' — become the excuse for not really looking at the violence of poverty, or reading the effect on everyone in its orbit.

Mukherjee confronts us with the deranged performances of both master and slave. There is Lakshman, forced by poverty to beat and tether a wild bear so that it will dance for a handful of rupees. The power struggle between this unlikely couple is profound, and the entertainment they produce enacts their mutual humiliation. And Milly, in service from the age of eight, treated like an animal by successive employers, forced to sleep on the kitchen floor, fed leftover scraps, and beaten when she breaks a cup. The worst of these employers becomes so enraged at any sign of independence she imprisons Milly, and threatens to brand her face with a hot iron: 'Flat 10,' the narrator observes, 'had become like a circus.'

Mukherjee repeats certain words, complicating his novel with every accretion of meaning. So the cookery writer observes that recipes handed down can never be repro-

duced: each cook brings their own 'hand' to the food, and it is this unique creativity, the expression of freedom, that power is threatened by and seeks to control. In Milly's village Maoist rebels cut off her brother's hand; while the 'romantic' emperor who built the Taj Mahal, cuts off his workers' fingers so that his mausoleum could never be reproduced. In the same way, images of breaking amass to the point where the story withdraws from its own performance, reduced to a breakdown of material cost (rent, water, electricity, food).

Finally, in its dialectical ending, *A State of Freedom's* artfully handled piecing together of story fragments is held in tension by a counterforce of textual disintegration. Capital letters and full stops disappear, sentences fragment, words break into poetic suggestions reminding us of the reduced, hollow men and women, trapped and fated by an order the writer would break, while acknowledging that art, in the end, cannot achieve this: 'He is husk of course he is at last.'

Stuart Devlin's Sculpture

Modern coins the sizes of shine
swept off my friend's bureau in Ghent
and pocketed by my careless habit —
not brown pennies too dull to return

they include designer Devlin's sculpture
of the duckbilled animal
swimming up to the top swirl
and five kangaroo tails mixed to a dollar.

When the Irish attained their republic
they mounted their noble beasts trim,
each well inside a knurled rim
and labelled in lapidary Gaelic

while our successors simply enact
themselves; the lyrebird lapped under music,
echidna belly-on like a buckle
each numerally off centre and whacked.

What is the use of small change?
To pay small debts, toss up, delight children,
to gamble by the jingle-crash billion —
to clean your teeth, with the card tasting strange.

—Les Murray

Independent coinage designed for Australia by
Stuart Devlin, issued in 1966 and still in circulation

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Digital transformation is key to all sorts of organisations across the UK. I am excited to see the launch of The Telegraph Digital Enterprise Network and D.E.N LIVE and happy to contribute to it and learn from it.

Tony Gosling

**Director of Data, Analytics and Insight
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Acid reign

Arthur House celebrates the rise of rave culture

In 1988–9, British youth culture underwent the biggest revolution since the 1960s. The music was acid house, the drug: Ecstasy. Together they created the Second Summer of Love — a euphoric high that lasted a year and a half and engulfed Britain's youth in a hedonistic haze of peace, love and unity. At the end of a decade marked by social division and unemployment, acid house transcended class and race, town and country, north and south. Amid the smoke and lasers, an entire generation came up together.

How did it happen? The story starts in Ibiza, which by the mid-1980s had outgrown its roots as a hippie commune and was attracting beautiful people from all over the world. The island's carefree, all-night parties and eclectic music impressed a young DJ called Paul Oakenfold on his first visit in 1985. Oakenfold was determined to bring this blissed-out scene back to rainy London, with its exclusive dress codes and judgmental door policies. Although his first experiment at a Balearic club failed, another trip to Ibiza in 1987 convinced him to try again. 'I brought a few friends over for my birthday and 30 years later we're still talking about it,' he says.

Oakenfold and his friend Danny Ramp-ling each started Balearic nights in London in the autumn of 1987. The Future and Shoom were wildly popular, not least because they coincided with the first major influx of Ecstasy into Britain. 'The drugs were better than any before or since,' says James Delingpole, an early convert. 'Everyone was loved up in a way that subsequent generations haven't experienced.' The empathy-enhancing properties of Ecstasy saw people from all walks of life become best friends for the night. After years of beating each other senseless on the terraces, even football casuals were putting aside their differences and 'getting right on one, matey'.

Noticing that their baggy-clothed, pill-up patrons wanted to dance to repetitive beats, the Balearic DJs started playing more of the new acid-house records coming out of Chicago. The 'acid' in the name referred not to LSD, but to Phuture's 'Acid Tracks', a record whose hypnotic, squelchy Roland TB-303 bass sound set the blueprint for the

genre. 'House' was already the established term for Chicago's own brand of electronic music, characterised by a 4/4 beat and syn-copated hi-hat (say 'boots, cats, boots, cats' out loud and you'll get the idea). It had initially found an audience around 1984 among

The British have a proud history of getting off their face in a field

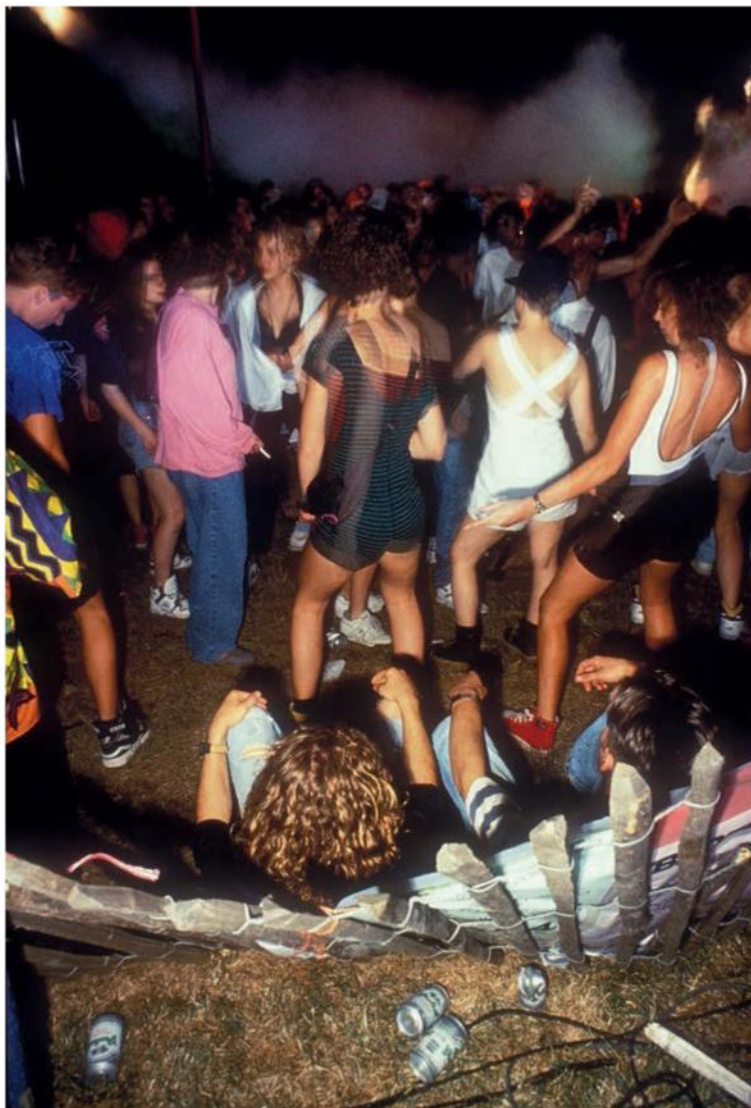
the African-American and gay communities at Chicago clubs such as the Warehouse, or 'house' for short.

By the spring of 1988, a mere six months after the Balearic clubs launched in London, acid house had become a nationwide phenomenon. 'We went from 300 to 1,500 people a night in six weeks,' Oakenfold recalls of Spectrum, his pioneering acid-house night on a Monday at Heaven. The Trip at the Astoria, run by another member of the 'Ibiza Four', Nicky Holloway, was another runaway success. By the summer of 1988,

shrewd young promoters were cashing in on the craze by putting on legally dubious raves wherever they could: abandoned warehouses, aircraft hangars, even a disused platform at Paddington.

One of them, Tony Colston-Hayter, found a loophole in the law by positioning his Sunrise parties as private members' clubs. Another, Tin Tin, would ensure there was always a barrister on site to talk the police around. While many ravers considered themselves among the disenfranchised youth, these promoters embodied the entrepreneurial spirit of the times. 'They would never have accepted it, because it just wasn't cool, but they were Thatcherite,' says Paul Staines, who worked as Colston-Hayter's publicist and is now better known as the political blogger Guido Fawkes. 'They were the first young people to have mobile phones.'

At first the media didn't know what to make of acid house. The *Sun* dabbled with endorsing it in October 1988, offering read-



Sorted for E's and whizz: revellers at a Tribal Dance rave, M25 Orbital, East Grinstead, August 1989

PHOTO: PHACIA/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ers cut-price smiley-face T-shirts, but turned on it weeks later, seizing the opportunity to whip up a moral panic. Headlines decrying the evils of Ecstasy — an infinitely safer drug than alcohol — became the norm in the tabloids. Some articles even claimed it had aphrodisiac properties that led inevitably to ‘sex romps’ on the dance floor.

Nevertheless, the party stretched on into 1989: the second Second Summer of Love. This was the year of the Orbital raves. Colston-Hayter would play a cat-and-mouse game with the police, using British Telecom’s Voicebank system to keep locations secret until the last minute. Partygoers would call a number to receive answer-phone messages that would be updated with meeting points around the M25 before the site was finally revealed. The trick was to get enough people to the rave before the police, who would then have no choice but to let it go ahead for fear of provoking a riot.

As the media outrage mounted, the police established a Pay Party Unit to crack down on the illegal raves. Helicopters scoured the countryside, and in one case frogmen were

Before 1988, a night out had been about what you wore and who you ended up punching

deployed to intercept a boat party on the Thames. When Graham Bright, Tory MP for Luton South, drafted a bill to increase the penalties for unlicensed parties, Paul Staines responded by launching the libertarian Freedom to Party campaign at the Conservative party conference in November 1989. It fizzled out after a few demonstrations, attesting to the apolitical ambitions of most ravers.

Rave culture lived on, initially in the form of the ‘free party’ movement. Organised by anarchist collectives such as Spiral Tribe, free parties were frequented by crusties and New Age travellers and culminated in 1992 at Castlemorton Common. This week-long gathering of up to 40,000 people in the Malvern Hills was the catalyst for Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, which notoriously banned parties of more than 20 people from playing ‘a succession of repetitive beats’ in 1994.

The great era of illegal raves may have been over, but the genie was out of the bottle. Before 1988, a night out had been about what you wore and who you ended up punching. Acid house changed this forever, reorienting leisure around music, drugs and dancing. It spawned countless musical subgenres and established DJs as godlike shamans that now sell out stadiums around the world. Electronic dance music may have started in America, but Britain was the first country fully to embrace it. From druidic ceremonies to medieval carnivals, the British have a proud history of getting off their face in a field. And what a healthy and liber-

ating thing that is every now and then. The world has us to thank for such a gift.

Sky Arts’s three-part series on the 30th anniversary of acid house, The Agony & The Ecstasy, starts on 11 August, 9 p.m.

Profile

Who is Kirill Petrenko?

Norman Lebrecht

Two summers ago, the BBC were offered a Proms visit by the Bavarian State Orchestra with its music director, Kirill Petrenko. The conversation went something like this.

BBC: ‘Petrenko, isn’t he the chap that conducts Liverpool?’

Munich: ‘No, that’s Vasily Petrenko. This one is Kirill.’

BBC: ‘Well, we don’t really know about him over here. He won’t sell at the Proms.’

Barely was the snub delivered than Kirill Petrenko was elected music director of the Berlin Philharmonic, the most coveted orchestra on earth, and the music biz had a good laugh at the BBC’s dumb insularity. But let’s not be too beastly to the BBC: its ignorance was universally shared.

The new Berlin chief, in his mid-forties, is as close as you can get to being an unknown commodity. He has never given a media interview (my request for an off-the-record coffee was coolly declined) and has made just five commercial recordings. He refuses to play maestro games — you conduct my orchestra, I’ll conduct yours — and is no respecter of vanities. When the Berliners handed him Sir Simon Rattle’s job, Petrenko swiftly renewed his Munich contract until 2021. He’ll take Berlin in his own time.

It’s hard to keep count of the moulds he has broken. He will be Berlin’s first Russian chief, its first beard since Arthur Nikisch (died 1922), its first Jew. At the time of his election he had not worked with the Berlin Philharmonic for more than four years and had no plans to return. Yet the moment the ballot was cast, Berlin players told anyone who would listen that he was exactly what was needed — a breach with the stolid fixities of orchestral music and a leap into the void with a leader of fixed principles who might, just might, cleanse the system of its toxic delusions.

Could Kirill Petrenko be the long-awaited saviour of classical music? The son of Siberian musicians who migrated to Austria in 1990, he studied conducting in Vienna and landed his first job in the small town of Meiningen. Not yet 30, he caught the eye by conducting the four operas of Wagner’s *Ring* on successive nights. Bayreuth booked him for the next summer and Berlin’s Komische Oper installed him as music director.

Musicians in big cities inhabit a goldfish bowl, swimming in and out of each other’s circles. When word spread from the Komische that the new guy was pretty good, players from the Berlin Phil dropped by to deputise and socialise. Petrenko impressed them as a natural *primus inter pares*, one who gets musicians to do what he wants, often without them knowing he has asked.

His rehearsals are closed, and intimate. Facing the Israel Philharmonic, which has a reputation for eating young batons for breakfast, he tapped on his stand and asked for a special favour. He confided that he had two grandmothers living in an apartment in Bat Yam, south of Tel Aviv. ‘It’s OK,’ he said, ‘they live in peace. But I promised them a good concert. So, please, let us work very hard to give (my) grandmothers a very good concert.’ The Israeli musicians melted like gelato in sunlight.

At Bayreuth he shared duties with Christian Thielemann, a Wagnerian of reactionary political views, and the naive Latvian Andris Nelsons. The more odious the festival’s faux-modern productions, the more audiences cheered the maestros. The team soon broke up. Nelsons accused Thielemann of interfering with his rehearsals and the soprano Anja Kampe walked out of Thielemann’s *Tristan und Isolde*, while continuing to sing in Petrenko’s *Ring*. German media reported that Kampe and Petrenko had been in a relationship. This is the only known clue to Petrenko’s personal life.

He appears to guard his privacy more out of old-fashioned fastidiousness than

Could Petrenko be the long-awaited saviour of classical music?

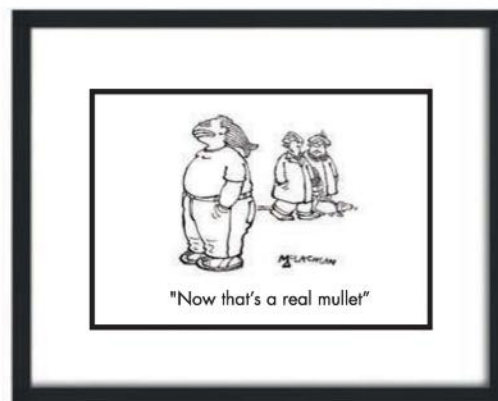
the fear of tabloid prurience. Musicians find him friendly, open and incredibly hard working. In 2010 he became music director of Bavarian State Opera alongside the Austrian Nikolaus Bachler as general director, turning Munich into the world’s most exacting and exciting opera hub, home base to Jonas Kaufmann and Anja Harteros as well as some of the most challenging productions on earth.

The company’s quality is built on Petrenko’s dedication. A member of one of Munich’s three symphony orchestras, summoned to cover at the opera, was told to see the maestro for a quick run-through. Expecting a five-minute chat about tricky entries, he found Petrenko waiting for him at the stage door, score in hand, ready to devote an hour of his time to a single substitute player.

The Munich performances I have seen — one world première on stage and several online — impressed me in both line and lyricism. Petrenko has that rare, Furtwänglerian ability to convey, from the first downbeat, the structure of all that follows.

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Players tell me they find his presence quietly reassuring. Avoiding lavish gestures, he instils conviction and self-confidence.

When the Berlin Phil called time on Rattle in 2014 the musicians split between the bumptious Thielemann and a fistful of candidates marked Anyone-but-Thielemann. After Andris Nelsons was eliminated, Petrenko finally beat Thielemann in a day-long secret conclave by, it is said, a single vote. Typically, he was absent from his victory announcement.

So the highest-profile orchestra now has the shyest chief conductor. How will that work? Petrenko has told players he will not give media interviews but will appear once a year at a press conference, where he can be questioned on musical matters. He will also do video chats with musicians and his concerts will be streamed on Berlin's Digital Concert Hall, which has a 30,000 subscriber base. Unlike all other maestros, he has the merit of total novelty.

But what really excited the players is the difference. After decades of being driven by record labels and commercial interests, the Berlin Philharmonic is reverting to a pre-Karajan world where the concert experience is unmediated and all that matters is the music. Petrenko, who likes orphaned works — Elgar's second symphony, the shorter works of Josef Suk, the colour symphonies of Scriabin — could be a game-changer. The BBC are desperately trying to get him for next summer's Proms.

Museums

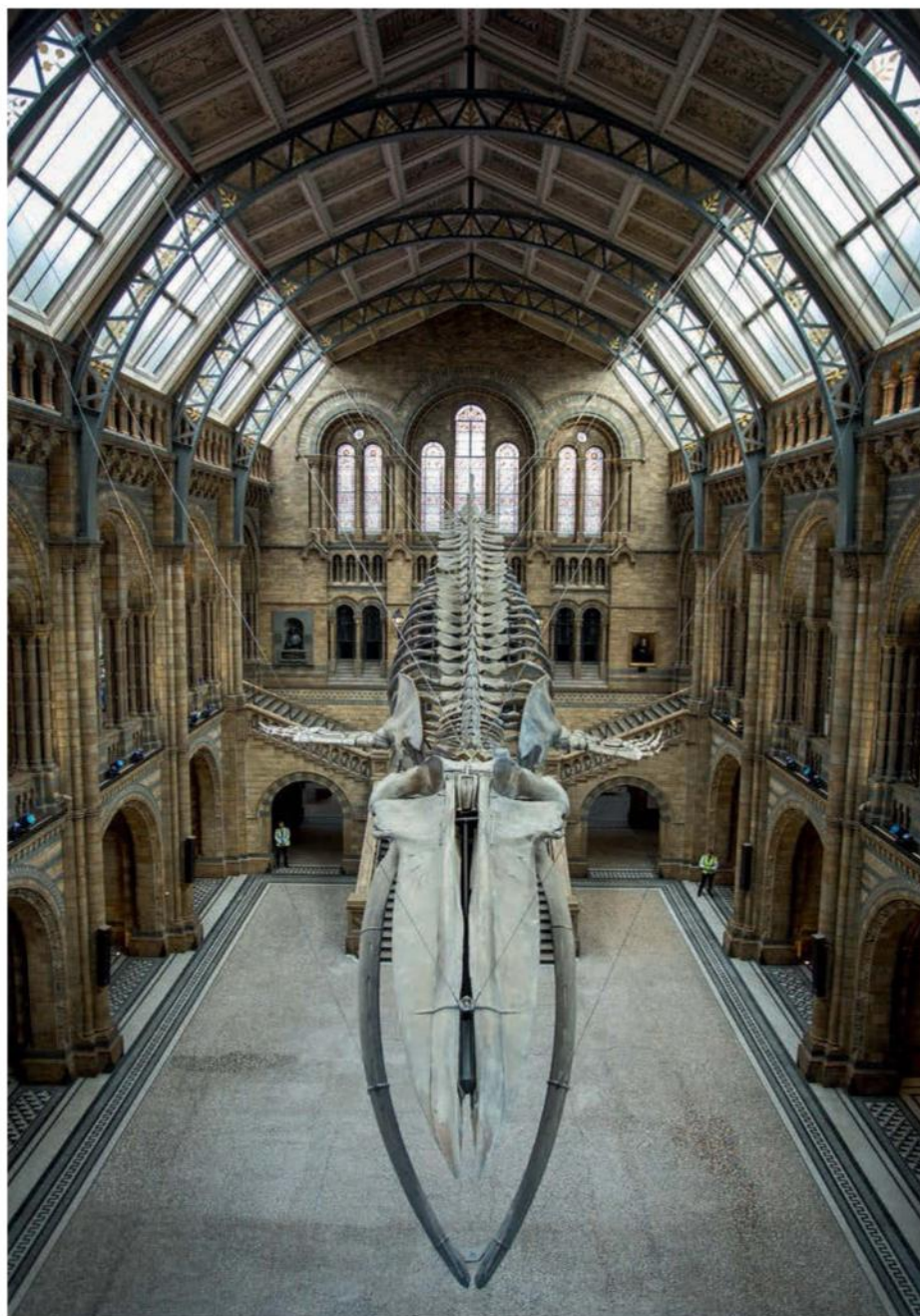
Cathedral of creation

Melanie McDonagh

Sometimes, it pays to rediscover what's already under your nose. I've been umpteenth times to the Natural History Museum but I don't think I've ever seen it properly, not even at the evening parties I've been to under Dippy-the-Dinosaur, until now. I visited the new and refurbished Hintze Hall and it was a revelation. The thing that strikes most visitors is that there isn't a dinosaur any more — Dippy is on tour — and he's been replaced by Hope, who is a) a blue whale, b) female and c) genuine (the dinosaur was fake).

Swings and roundabouts. We have lost a dinosaur, but we've gained an entirely new perspective on an astonishing building, what a *Times* leader in 1881 called a 'Temple of Nature'. What it does is remind us afresh of the genius of Alfred Waterhouse, and the profoundly Christian conception of the museum as a manifestation of the creative power of God by its founder, Richard Owen, a naturalist whose genius was matched only by his capacity for making enemies.

What the renovation of the great central



Hope, the blue whale, replaces Dippy, the diplodocus, in the Natural History Museum's Hintze Hall

hall has done is allowed us to see it properly, as effectively an ecclesiastical building. Hope-the-Whale has been winched into the ceiling, where her skeleton swoops down on her unseen prey. What that does is to clear the central space from the clutter around the dinosaur — except for some unfortunate information desks — and lift the viewer's eye to the ceiling and the two upper galleries, with their forward-looking use of natural light.

Reader, it's glorious.

The museum has been a victim of the

old, hackneyed C.P. Snow idea of the two cultures; yet it's visited by science people and families looking to keep the kiddies amused. Whereas the V&A across the road can be unapologetically beautiful, the Natural History Museum is for the people who don't care about that sort of thing; they're scientists, not aesthetes or religious. Indeed, I can remember a period when the curators seemed actually to be trying to escape from their captivating, purposeful building; you got white boxes for exhibits built inside the bays with their playful figures of creatures

living and extinct. The buzz then was around the interactive Creepy Crawlies section, not the Victorian cases of stuffed creatures.

Well it's a different story now. The new, clean design for the hall from Casson Mann means that you can properly see the triple-layered space and the cathedral-like nave with its Romanesque arches and grand staircase. There are ten new uncluttered Wonder Bays to tell the story of the evolution of life on the eastern side — meteorite to mastodon — and the diversity of present life on the west — insects to giraffes. Richard Owen, in his original conception, wanted easy access from the 'specimens of existing to those of extinct animals'; in the central hall they face each other. (It's pleasing that the next stage of the development will include a dinosaur park; Owen was responsible for the giant dinosaur figures in the Crystal Palace in Sydenham.)

He insisted that the museum, which was meant to spread over five acres, was to be a place for ugly creatures, not just spectacular ones, for the important thing was appreciating 'the perfect fitness of the thing to its function'. He would have had a downer on the Instagram approach to exhibits. 'As the purpose of a Museum of Natural History

The ecclesiastical nature of the building was intentional: Waterhouse's fulfilment of Owen's religious vision

is to set forth the extent and variety of the Creative Power, with the sole rational aim of imparting and diffusing that knowledge which begets the right spirit in which all Nature should be viewed, there ought to be no partiality for any particular class merely on account of the quality which catches and pleases the passing gaze.' He was also keen on evening openings, to give working people the chance to visit.

He would have been thrilled by the blue whale — celaphods were the first category in his plan for the museum: 'one specimen, at least, of... the whale-kind should be prepared as an example of the power of the Creator as manifested by the hugeness of the creature'. In fact, Owen suggested it would be a warning of its possible extinction from new methods of slaughter; it could be the 'sole and unique taxidermal evidence of this marvel of creation'.

The ecclesiastical character of the building was intentional; it was the Quaker Waterhouse's fulfilment of Owen's religious vision, specifically in the bold choice of German Romanesque, faced with terracotta, now cleaned and lovely.

Actually, the modern museum is a sort of cathedral, with Darwin enthroned on the grand staircase as its guiding deity. He should be replaced by Owen, returned to his old position overlooking the nave. This is his museum, a cathedral of creation.

Proms

Time to end authenticity

Alexandra Coghlan

Prom 23: Israel in Egypt – Choir and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, William Christie
Royal Albert Hall

Prom 25: Monteverdi Choir, English Baroque Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner
Royal Albert Hall

They say the first step towards recovery is admitting that you have a problem. So I'm staging an intervention and asking the BBC Proms to admit what they've known for some time: they have a big problem when it comes to early music. How to perform it, where to perform it, even who should perform it — these are all questions that, year after year, remain unsatisfactorily, inconsistently or superficially answered, and there's little in this year's programming to suggest that 2017 will be any different.

Up until now the festival's conversation about early music has been dominated by the red-herring question of venue. When the readers of *Time Out* magazine voted the Royal Albert Hall one of the 20 best music venues in London I'll venture it wasn't performances of Palestrina or Pergolesi that they had in mind. The Proms have tacitly acknowledged the difficulty of this acoustic nightmare of a venue in recent years, exiling most of the early music concerts to an increasing number of satellite venues — initially just Cadogan Hall, but now with the new 'Proms at...' strand to churches, car parks and all other kinds of spaces.

This is good news — up to a point. The whole point of the Proms is its open-armed, come-one-come-all attitude; the accessibility of tickets, both in terms of price and number, is absolutely central to this. When you swap the RAH (capacity over 5,000 before you open the Arena to Prommers) for even Cadogan Hall, let alone the tiny Sam Wanamaker Playhouse or Wilton's Music Hall, you lose your casual ticket buyers, your first-timers, tourists — all those for whom an unexpected early music encounter might be most telling. The success of the exceptions — Alina Ibragimova and Yo-Yo Ma's solo Bach performances in 2015 — only emphasises this.

So if changing the venue isn't the solution, what is? I think the answer is two-fold. The first part is to do with repertoire; we know certain pieces, certain composers, lend themselves better to this space, so why fight it? Pygmalion's performance of the Monteverdi *Vespers* proved again this year what we already knew from John Eliot Gardiner's superb, spatialised staging in 2010 — that this is a piece whose musical scope and

drama just works in this building. The same goes for solo Bach, Handel's larger-scale oratorios and a cappella renaissance polyphony, while out goes medium-sized baroque and almost anything with a chamber organ.

The second part is tougher. We've fought so hard to establish historically informed performance, to swap contemporary instruments for period ones, lush 19th-century orchestrations for lean authentic ones, that we're naturally unwilling to regress. But in a space like the RAH, surely even Monteverdi would have wanted to go the whole Leppard and throw some heft at the problem?

Some of the most exciting performances of baroque and early classical repertoire we've heard this season (Rattle's Haydn with the LSO; Rebel's *Les éléments* — an opener for Joshua Weilerstein and the BBCSO) have been not from period specialists but symphony orchestras. Not because the qual-

When Gardiner and Christie cannot raise a thrill, we have a problem

ity of playing was any better, but because the repertoire was embraced into a musical continuum, was explicitly related to the rest of musical history rather than ghettoised, set apart. If this means we lose authenticity then I think it's a price worth paying for music that has the spirit (if not quite the sound) that the composer intended.

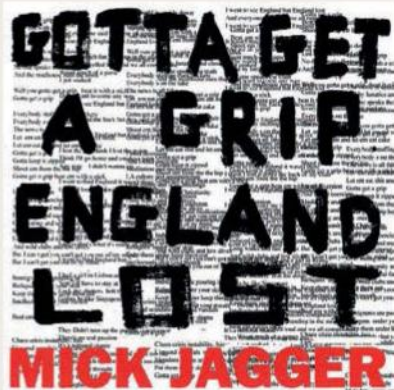
All of which is a reaction not to poor baroque offerings this year, but quite the reverse. Concerts by two early music giants — John Eliot Gardiner and William Christie — last week showed period performance at its absolute best. But when the Choir and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in full spate, singing one of Handel's great contrapuntal choruses, or the Monteverdi Choir and the gritty-bright early instruments of the English Baroque Soloists performing Schütz's vibrant polychoral setting of Psalm 115 cannot raise a thrill, then the problem is not the musicians but the context. That both concerts sound markedly more exciting on iPlayer than live only goes to prove the point.

While it was a mistake to opt for the three-part rather than the more commonly used two-part version of Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, once the musical drama of frogs, locusts, lice and hailstones began, Christie and his young performers gave us bags of character and textual clarity. Step-out soloists struggled to command the space, but bass-baritone Dingle Yandell stood out in his warmly characterful solos.

A similar setup in Gardiner's Reformation-themed concert of Schütz and Bach cantatas led to the same issues (especially when the tight semicircle of singers left much of the audience facing backs not faces). But, as with the Handel, there was no

THE LISTENER

England Lost/Gotta Get A Grip



Two songs in which Sir Michael informs us that he is distressed by both Brexit and Donald Trump. Released with, according to the 70-year-old singer, 'urgency': he can see that we are in trouble and was naturally anxious to help us out. The first, 'England Lost', is at least redeemed by a soupçon of wit. Jagger explains that he went to see England play football but that they lost, and he got wet in the rain. But it then turns into a sort of state of the nation thing, by the simple addition of an apostrophe and the letter 's'. England's lost, he bemoans, and chucks in an incoherent allusion regarding our preoccupation with immigration.

Then there's 'Gotta Get A Grip', unburdened by any kind of wit at all. Here, Jagger complains that the world is led by lunatics and clowns. 'The news is all fake/ Let 'em eat chicken and let 'em eat steak/ Let 'em eat shit, let 'em eat cake.' How very true that is. The music? The Rolling Stones have been plundered by countless bands so I don't object to Jagger pillaging mid-period Led Zeppelin for the riffs on 'England Lost'. A cut-and-paste hip-hop beat and some ur-rap drags the song, kicking and screaming, from 1974. 'Gotta Get A Grip', meanwhile, sounds like an outtake from pretty much any 1980s Stones album.

I always thought the Stones were more convincing when imitating poor white Americans ('Dead Flowers' and 'Torn And Frayed') than poor black Americans ('Fingerprint File' and 'Miss You'). And incalculably better as a band than as solo artists. Even Keef. But especially Mick.

— Rod Liddle

doubting the exhilarating energy and beauty of the music itself. Listening to the idiomatic phrasing, the nuanced approach to text, the tight, responsive ensemble, would I really have swapped it for a choir-of-thousands spectacular instead? Damn right I would.

Radio

Big Auntie

Kate Chisholm

It's sneaky, the way in which the BBC, so much regarded as part of the family as to be nicknamed 'Auntie', has introduced the need to login (or register) whenever you want to listen to something on iPlayer. Maybe I'm doing something wrong because the alert message assures me I will be kept logged in, and that I should only have to login once. But even that is once too much. After all, until now, we've had the chance to listen again to whatever we fancy with very little fuss and almost instantly. That freedom feels very different if you have to rummage around in your memory for the password and then ensure you've keyed it in correctly — and especially if you consider that this means the no-longer-quite-so-benign Auntie will now be able to trace not just your tastes, inclinations and habits of mind but also your daily routine.

The technology behind digital listening is amazing. We take so much of it for granted, the speed, the accessibility, the flexibility, while the electronic wizards who make this all possible are not paid enough or acknowledged enough (do we even know their names?) for the ways in which they have transformed our everyday lives. But it's worth pondering. Once upon a time we could listen again without being monitored. Now Big Auntie has the potential to listen in on our every connection.

At first I thought little of the change, assuming it would soon become automatic, the password remembered on my computer, the bother and time it takes of no great concern. But every time I'm obliged to key in the password, it makes me think about its implications. How we listen is being changed. How we receive radio is altering. How the BBC treats its audience is undergoing an extraordinary makeover.

It's not all portents of gloom, however. Three cheers should be raised for Radio 2, which this week has not only provided something for younger listeners, at a time of day and year when they might actually be listening, but it's also a drama, not heard on the network for four years — since Tom Stoppard's specially commissioned play inspired by Pink Floyd. Once upon a time Radio 2 (and its former incarnation the Light Programme) was the go-to place for soaps, comedy and adventure serials. Now, it

feels really odd to tune in to 88–90.2 FM in the morning and instead of music or Jeremy Vine talking to Vince Cable (or the like), to discover instead the brilliant children's writer Michael Morpurgo introducing an adaptation of his book, *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea* (directed by Frank Stirling). He's such a natural storyteller and can draw you in straightaway, with his voice, so warm and natural, his ease of manner, his sense of phrasing and his words, simple but direct, as if he were talking to you, and you alone.

This was less a drama than an old-fashioned tale told by a master (Morpurgo himself with Ian McMillan as the radio adapter), with the help of no less than Toby Jones and Jason Donovan. Arthur (played by Donovan) is looking back on his life as an orphan, one of thousands transplanted to Australia and other Commonwealth countries from the 1850s to 1970. The idea was to give them a chance to find a new life but in reality they were cheap labour for greedy farmers like the wonderfully named Mr 'Piggy' Bacon, who were paid to take them in. Arthur has a miserable time, but of course with Morpurgo there is always redemption and hope and, amid the vicious characters (and the idiocy of those in charge), there are always real people, kind and generous, not in a grand

Every time I'm obliged to key in my iPlayer password, it makes me think about the implications

way but just because that's how we all get along. I just hope the kids managed to find it — and were not put off by the songs, taken from 'The Ballads of Child Migration', which were beautifully sung but were incongruously grown-up in style for what I thought was intended to draw in younger listeners.

Also on Radio 2, Janice Long's new series, *Long Walk With...* (produced by Mark Simpson) took us this week to the back streets of Liverpool in the company of Holly Johnson (of Frankie Goes To Hollywood), who was born there, with perfect timing, in 1960. The city he knew as a child had not yet woken up to the megabucks it could make out of the Beatles, so he walked past Lennon's house without paying it too much attention. The Cavern had not yet been turned into a mecca for Beatles fans. Johnson's club of choice as a teenager was called, not so wistfully, Eric's.

The first gig he went to was David Bowie, skiving off school to queue for a ticket at the Liverpool Empire. It gave him the confidence to realise it was OK to be different. Walking him back into his past was revealing as it became obvious how much music was part of his growing up, from first hearing T.Rex on his sister's black-and-white record-player to being fascinated not by the Daleks but by Delia Derbyshire's extraordinary radiophonic theme for *Doctor Who*.

Lloyd Evans

Pleasance Dome, until 27 august

Trumpageddon has a great title and a sensational opening. Play-goers are ushered into their seats by a twitchy secret service agent in a menacing black suit. Outside a chopper approaches, thud-thud-thud. The chopper lands. A door swings open. Lights blaze. Smoke swirls. Chords of stirring music soar. And here comes the president, whooping and waving at the audience with contemptuous vanity. He puffs out his chest and greets members of the crowd with handshakes and comments, insulting the men and peering down the women's cleavages. And he's hilarious, for a few minutes, but this imposture quickly palls. The show seems careless and unloved. Trump's costume is a mess. His face is a fat oval, bearing a slather of tangerine slap that trickles down the sinews of his neck. His blonde hair is incorrectly swept back from the forehead, not forward from

Not About Heroes traces the relationship between Siegfried Sassoon and his protégé Wilfred Owen. We meet the master, Sassoon, as he greets a nervous and unpublished poet seeking an autograph. Sassoon reads Owen's early scribbles and encourages him to 'sweat' over his poetry. The play is static and stagey at first but it develops into a riveting portrait of literary mentorship. The finest scene shows

Education, Education, Education is a slice of dramatic mayhem that wants to be a pantomime, a comedy and a documentary all at once. We're in a bog-standard comp on the morning of Blair's victory, 2 May 1997, and the staff are looking forward to a huge injection of cash from their New Labour saviours. Meanwhile they've got a school to run. Simmering resentments boil over at lunchtime. A troubled teenager stages a sit-in. A drama teacher gets punched in the gob. A food-fight erupts in the corridors and the violence spills over into the staff room. The escalating chaos is brilliantly handled and the characters are superbly drawn. The head is a dippy idealistic Welshman struggling to suppress his loathing for his control-freak deputy. The pompous history teacher tries but fails to overcome the puffery of his office. The head of English is a golden-hearted sweetie who can't stop her pupils running wild during lessons. A hilariously camp German trainee offers wry comments on Cool Britannia. And there's a lonely sports master who confiscates a Tamagotchi (a portable electronic pet) only to become obsessed with its feeding and sleeping habits. I was riveted by this show. So was the audience. And, like much of the Fringe, it's in the wrong place. It belongs in London.





Andrew Shore, Alex Otterburn, Allison Cook and Susan Bullock (left to right) in Edinburgh Festival's *Greek*

Opera Classy and classic

Richard Bratby

Greek

Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

Die Walküre

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

The Edinburgh International Festival began with a double helping of incest. Curiously, *Greek* — Mark-Anthony Turnage's East End retelling of the Oedipus myth, which was greeted with universal acclaim at its premiere in 1988, and which has gone on to be one of British opera's biggest export success stories — was tagged on the Festival website as being suitable for 'risk takers'. Whereas Wagner's *Die Walküre* — which ends its first act in ecstatic celebration of a sex act so transgressive that even in 2017 it can draw appalled gasps from an audience — was described as being ideal for 'traditionalists'. Bizarre. Perhaps brothers and sisters sleep together all the time in Morningside; I couldn't say.

Greek first, and Joe Hill-Gibbins's new production for Scottish Opera and Opera Ventures confronts the audience with a daz-

zling white screen. Out stomps Alex Otterburn as Eddy and stands there, sizing up the audience with a glint in his eye: Dennis the Menace as Droog. Red tracksuits and neon-blue mini-dresses jump cartoonishly out against the whiteness, and words are punched up before us like captions in some oversize adult edition of the *Beano*. And here, *Beano* means Heinz. At moments of crisis, real-time video projections fill the backdrop with baked beans, spurting ketchup and live, squirming maggots. Eddy murders his café-owning dad against a full English breakfast, messily deconstructed beyond Gordon Ramsay's darkest nightmares. Pity the orchestral musicians who have to sit next to the video booth and actually smell it.

Still, *Greek* deals in extremes. The characters are archetypes who merely happen to speak in the Chas & Dave mockney of Steven Berkoff's libretto. Susan Bullock as Mum and Andrew Shore as Dad certainly did more than just play it for laughs (though there were plenty of those, at least in the first half). But then there was Allison Cook as Eddy's wife and (it transpires) mother, singing with a smoky, curdled sensuality that could veer into either brutality or passion. And there was Otterburn as Eddy: an utterly magnetic monster, spitting out the spoken text one minute, singing with an eerie, yearn-

ing sweetness and moving with an almost balletic physical agility the next. Controlled and compelling, he was described in the programme as a 'Scottish Opera Emerging Artist'. I'd say he's emerged.

As for those 'risk takers' — well, there were lots of empty seats. Perhaps too much of the spin around this opera treats it as Thatcher-era agitprop (in fact, Berkoff's allusions to heat waves and uncollected rubbish locate its inspiration pretty clearly in the late 1970s). And when a hip Festival crowd guffawed at these caricatures of the ghastly white English working class, it wasn't just the maggots that made me feel slightly queasy. Yet both responses miss the point. The biggest rediscovery of the evening was the startling beauty of the 26-year-old Turnage's breakthrough score — the bruised lyricism between the outbreaks of ultra-violence (I've never heard the notorious sequence where the orchestra hammers on riot shields sound so purely musical). Cor anglais and viola struggle to mourn through the urban racket, while muted brass and baritone sax hint at the blues. Something timeless sings through *Greek*, and not the least achievement of this terrific production was the way the Scottish Opera orchestra under Stuart Stratford found so much pathos, as well as disgust, in this bona fide modern classic.

There's not much space to deal with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra's concert performance of *Die Walküre*; but then, there can never be enough space for *Die Walküre*. The cast were as thrilling in performance as they'd looked on paper, with singing of luminous expression and power from Amber Wagner as Sieglinde, and Christine Goerke as a Brünnhilde who grew in compassion before our eyes — overwhelmingly courageous in her final confrontation with Bryn Terfel's all-too-human Wotan. Terfel's voice is leaner than it used to be; his commitment to every word and note of this role more passionate than ever. You felt the wounded nobility of Karen Cargill's Fricka, and while others enjoyed the sound of Simon O'Neill as Siegmund more than I did, his anguish was as compelling as his ardour.

Andrew Davis, conducting, was initially slightly choppy and while there were some ravishingly turned corners (with the RSNO playing in fresh, glowing colours throughout), it didn't always feel as if voices and orchestra were part of the same musical fabric. This was Wagner conducted like Verdi. But then as Act One progressed Davis — like everyone present — seemed to catch the mighty flood-tide of Wagner's inspiration and from that point on, routine criticism becomes not just inadequate but impertinent. When Anton Bruckner met Wagner, it was reported that he fell to his knees in awe. After a performance of *Die Walküre* as heartfelt as this, that can feel like the only reasonable response.



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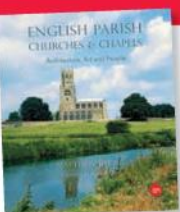
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Watercolour

By Claudia Massie

Like many artistically inclined children, I was given a set of Daler Rowney watercolours for my birthday one year. My first paints! What delights would I unleash with these cubes of colour? Well, practically none, as it turned out. Unschooled in the art of watercolour and evidently lacking any instinct for the medium, I used them, as undiluted as possible, to colour in my drawings of horses and *Dogtanian* characters. It was a bit fiddly with the blunt brush provided and, frankly, felt tip worked better.

I went on to art school where, in the late 1990s, everyone would rather have dropped dead than be seen prodding around a tin of watercolours. The closest we got was watching the hapless amateurs in the surprisingly addictive *Watercolour Challenge*. Only recently have I embraced the medium and now I wonder why it took me so long. These rich little cakes of pigment are so fun and versatile, easy to carry around and fast to work with. Occasionally, they even reward.

My relationship with watercolour has, in its distinctly modest way, followed the arc of the watercolour revolution that seized British art at around the turn of the 19th century. The golden age of British watercolour was of course dominated by Turner and his glorious, elemental way with the paints, all



'Dinant', by J.M.W. Turner, 1839

sea and storm, land and air, but he wasn't alone. His contemporaries, notable among them Constable, Thomas Girtin, John Robert Cozens and John Sell Cotman, were also taking watercolour beyond its accepted role as a tinting agent for colouring in drawings.

Turner, by contrast, used the paint as the central structure, building up images without the graphic groundwork traditionally demanded. He attacked his paper, washing, rubbing, scraping and scratching at the paint. The result was an unprecedented freshness and energy that both informed and was informed by his approach to oils.

Contrasting with this ethereal luminescence was the solidity of the flat planes of

colour used by John Sell Cotman and the moody, intensely romantic work of Girtin.

A theatrical John Robert Cozens watercolour of Lake Albano sold for an equally dramatic £2.4 million a few years ago; but his father, Alexander, was the more radical artist, inventing in 1785 the startlingly modern 'Blot' technique using watercolour and ink to create imagined landscapes and facilitating 'a production of chance with a small degree of design'.

Despite these daring adventures, and the later achievements of Matisse, O'Keefe, Hockney and thousands of others, watercolour retains a whiff of the dreaded Sunday painter and the amateur art show. The problem is that watercolour rewards the brave and mocks the meek, and nobody is meeker than the occasional artist who lives in paralysing fear of making a mistake.

Timidity leads to flatness, whereas a vigorous painting demands not only confident brushwork but also vision. The paper is essential in the success of watercolour. It is the brightest highlight available. With each layer, the paint becomes less transparent, so it is easy to squeeze the life from a painting by overworking it. I do this all the time. Watercolour punishes where oil forgives, but when it succeeds the world becomes a luminescent place.

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We Brits ought to feel smug: Amazon has spent several hundred billion dollars proving that Argos was right all along
— Rory Sutherland, p53

LIFE

High life Taki



Greece is jasmine, bougainvillea, mimosa, cypress, olive, pine, oregano and sage, rock, sand, wine, fruit and the bluest and cleanest water in the Med. The Peloponnese has the nicest, most welcoming and generous of people, none more than my host and hostess at their private island, literally a paradise on earth. Around 60 staff keep the place ticking along perfectly, and one thing I've learned in this long life of mine among the rich and famous is, you can't fake it with the ones who work for you: if they don't love you, it shows. I've seen it time and again, the long faces of staff among famous Italian carmakers, German industrialists, Texan oil giants. I've even seen it where Greek ship owners are concerned, we Greeks being particularly close with those who work for us. You are what those who work for you think of you. In the private island where I spent the last week, the faces of those who looked out for us told the story. We sure were one big happy family.

I sailed in and the trouble started as if a gun had gone off. A Nero-like feast awaited, fruit, vegetables, homemade pasta, rosé wine to tempt Odysseus to untie himself and take on Circe — but I spotted the danger quicker than you can say Englishmen. Three of them were descending towards the feast, so I let out a cry reminiscent of the warning at Mesolonghi, when treachery led the hated Turks to await the exodus of the encircled Greeks, who died to a man. 'I'm a Greek, a patriot, save some for me.' Gavin Rankin, proprietor of London's finest restaurant, Bellamy's, Dave Ker, a man who unbeknownst to him once won a male beauty contest in the Soviet Union, and the Duke of Marlborough, no comment needed, were about to attack the food and I happened to be hungry. The staff, headed by the major domo whose name is Hercules, is still laughing.

The mother of my children arrived that evening, commenting that I had put on weight and asking to know whether Phoebe had been around. I have convinced her

that the fictional Phoebe is my mistress, a 27-year-old from Kansas, who is beautiful but wild and a drunk. 'She ran off with some arms dealer,' I said, 'then got dropped off at Mykonos after wrecking his boat and dropping all his drugs in the sea.'

'The proper place for her,' was all the MoMC said.

We also played some mind games after we realised that all the guests happened to like each other, and rather a lot in some cases, as for example yours truly and Edla

*The rot starts at the top,
and it's the gong system that
needs fixing*

Marlborough. Me: Will you renounce your title and become simply Mrs Taki? The duchess: I'm flattered and you're so kind, but no! Me: Why not? The duchess: I'm too old for you. (She's in her thirties.) So I got a peck on the cheek for my troubles and her husband Jamie put his arm around me and told me not to take it personally. But oi did, oi did.

One game we played was making up the guests on a dream cruise. I suggested 'Sir' Philip and 'Lady' Green; a criminal American gangster romancing their daughter; James Stunt, Bernie Ecclestone's son-in-law, a man I suspect may be broke and is posing as a billionaire; Stevie Cohen, the lubricious Wall Street hedgefunder who made \$8 billion, paid only a couple of billion in fines for conduct unbecoming an honest man, and who slithered out of the hands of the fuzz by a thin thread-like margin; and a couple of Kardashians. My choices for the 'dream' cruise won hands down. Otherwise we spent

our days lazing in the sun, swimming on the beach with translucent water, playing tennis, and drinking chateaux at night while dining outdoors to the chirrup of cicadas and the sounds of Cole Porter. I even sang a lullaby to the duchess: 'I hear music and there's no one there, I smell blossoms and the trees are bare, all at once I seem to walk on air, I wonder why, I wonder why?' I was then interrupted by the duke: 'There is nothing you can take, to relieve that pleasant ache, you're not sick you're just in love.' Yippee!

And while I'm at it — the dream cruise that is — with dubious knights and even more dubious ladies, I'd like to know why my friend Wafic Said has not been knighted or ennobled for his non-stop charitable giving. Wafic is among the nicest and most generous of men for British causes, and they do not include all the good work he's done for Syrians refugees, yet we have great knights such as the aforementioned Green man. It is a disgrace, and someone better do something about it. The rot starts at the top, and it's the gong system that needs fixing. Ennoble Mr Said, strip some of their ill-gotten gongs, forbid any members of the Qatari ruling family from entering the country, and from now on send all my correspondence to Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire.

Low life Jeremy Clarke



My grandson and I are reprising the 1968 film *The Swimmer*. Burt Lancaster is an advertising executive at a pool party who attempts to swim eight miles home via his affluent Connecticut neighbourhood's outdoor swimming pools. We don't have a pool, but our friends are generous with offers to use theirs. Our aim is to take advantage of these offers by swimming in a different pool every day and working our way through the expat society of this remote part of the Provence.

It's Oscar's first trip abroad; he is staying for a fortnight. Today was day four. The effect of the contrast in his plastic mind between a flat above a hairdressers in New-



ton Abbot in Devon and a daily succession of private pools in a 42°C heatwave in the hills of Provence must be very great. He is red in the face but so far appears to be taking it all in his stride. The enormous, martial, intelligent ants have impressed him so far; also this one particular yellow-and-black lizard, inscrutable and pacific, which he persecutes daily without mercy until it loses its rag and attacks him. Once he brought it into the house with its toothless mouth clamped on the end of a stick.

On his first morning here we packed our Speedos and swam in a pool in front of a magnificent old pantiled Provençal villa. The owners were out, but had kindly left us a glass jug of iced water on a tray with two glasses on a filigree-wrought iron table. The jug was a masterpiece of 1950s design with a curving lip to hold back the ice cubes as you pour. A beautifully elaborate lace doily weighted with coloured beads was draped across the top to keep the flies off. The pair of upturned water glasses were heavy and stylish in their rustic simplicity. As we swam in the cold pellucid blue, all we could hear, above the slop of the water, was the perpetual quick-step marimba shuffle of the cigales

in the shade trees, punctuated by the sonorous clung of a single church bell from the monastery on the hill. We floated on our backs and saw a Bonelli's eagle on the wing in the air above us. 'What do you think of this then?' I said.

The next day's pool belonged to a foreign television correspondent who once lost a kidney to a Serbian sniper, and his Russian filmmaker wife. You enter the property

The contrast in his mind between a flat above a hairdressers in Devon and a daily succession of private pools in Provence must be very great

through a gate in the village and find yourself unexpectedly in the countryside. The house is a late 18th-century former mayor's residence in the shade of a magnificent old Aleppo pine. Captured Allied airmen were confined in the cellar by the Nazis during the war. We were welcomed and kissed by the filmmaker wearing a ruby dress and matching ruby slippers, and by Mary the cocker spaniel. The foreign correspondent was away in the Middle East. She led us to the pool,

advised us to keep our straw hats on even in the water and left us to it. This pool was secluded on three sides by mature lavender bushes. The fourth side overlooked a secluded valley. The air temperature was a dizzying 42°C; the pale green water was 25 and chilly. I felt it my duty to tell Oscar that not everybody here has houses and pools like this.

The next day we swam in the pool of a British TV presenter. I used to tell Oscar he was famous. Then, he didn't know what the word meant, and I'm not sure that he does now at the grand old age of seven. 'And this guy is even more famous than you,' I said. The sun was so fierce we stayed in the pool for the best part of the afternoon. The TV presenter and his wife and young son came in too. This pool was notable for the availability of the most advanced and powerful pump-action water pistols on the market, and comfortable snorkelling masks and goggles, and flippers, and a shark-fin buoyancy aid, and best of all, as far as Grandad was concerned, an outdoor refrigerated bar, packed solid with ice-cold Leffe beer, and a sort of bedouin tent to one side with comfortable sofas on which to drink them.

Tomorrow's pool is an infinity pool belonging to a comedian, I told Oscar last night after I'd said his prayers under the wobbling ceiling fan. What's an infinity pool, he said? I explained the concept of an infinity pool. And what's a comedian, he said? Someone who makes you laugh, I said. He was thinking about this, then his eyelids closed and stayed closed and he was asleep.

For the Vanishing Twin

Born of the same gene, though she died in the womb,
I imagine her, mother, as if she had lived
so brittle of bone she was inclined to break
twice each bone you never broke once,
to suffer migraines, panics and swoons,
to whistle a note before she slept
and be seated, always, to the left of you,

and her whole demeanour, like yours,
be drawn to the gap between her teeth,
her trust of plainer clothes offset
by your love of turquoise, yellows and pinks.
Every cold you did not catch she caught.
If you spoke abundantly for two
she mimed to your words, hid in her hair,

as if disappearing she hid in her hair.
So robust, so calcium-rich, you fought
to keep her with you for ninety years
and to hold somehow inside your chosen name
the names she never had
which hung like strange chemises on the rail:
Esther, Emily, Emmeline.

— Tim Liardet

Real life Melissa Kite



Like Steve McQueen gone slightly to seed, the builder boyfriend strode off into the sunset. Nothing becomes him so much as the manner of his leaving. He does so every now and then, this time, perhaps for good. I can't blame him. As he walked away, his blonde hair shining in the sun, it occurred to me that he is a free spirit. I watched him disappear down the track and thought, it's a shame to tie him down.

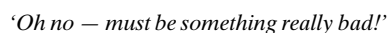
He did his best trying to renovate my wreck of a cottage but inevitably he imploded after assorted petty battles. Being dictated to by a Lib-Lab parish council would take its toll on anyone. It wasn't just the constant carping about our building materials being an eyesore.

The No Horse-Riding signs banning

I had to restrain him when it became apparent she wanted the hydrant to fill a

Maybe he had already taken the HRT by mistake that day because he had tears in his eyes. As for me, I yearn to walk to the shop and say: 'A packet of cigarettes please. The ones with the smoking baby on them.'

So I lie in the bath in my only finished room pondering what to do now. He's tough, the BB but, perhaps to his credit, I don't think he's as tough as me. They'll have to get up a lot earlier to wear me down.



The ♣10 was led. There's a possible loser in each suit, so the hand seemed to depend on a spade finesse. She won with the ♣K and ran the ♠J. Oops — one down. Luckily Nick was watching and pointed out she'd missed an extra chance: that West had the ♦K. She should win the ♣A, and play ♦A and another diamond. If West wins, a club can be discarded on the ♦Q — and then the spade finesse can be taken for a possible overtrick.

Chess

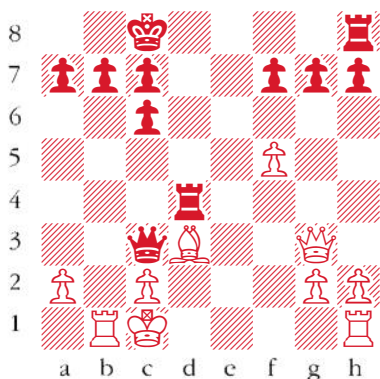
Test of time

Raymond Keene

Last week I pointed to the fact that games played at accelerated time limits are acquiring an official imprimatur that threatens to rival the well-established ratings, rankings and titles of chess played at classical time controls. This year's British Championship (the 104th) last weekend concluded in Llandudno with a four-way tie for first place. In order to separate the top four, a rapidplay play-off was necessary. So the British Championship title for the coming year has now been decided by games at faster speeds.

The final leading scores in the championship and the final involving the top four were as follows: Gawain Jones 10½; Luke McShane 9½; Craig Hanley and David Howell both 7; Richard Palliser, John Emms and Ameet Ghazi 6½.

Jones-McShane: Llandudno 2017



Black has two pawns and some attack for a piece but White's coming coup shattered his illusions. **20 Rxb7 Qa1+ If 20 ... Kxb7 21 Ba6+ wins the black queen. 21 Rb1 Qxa2 22 f6 g6 23 Qh3+ Rd7 24 Re1 Rhd8 25 Re4 c5 26 Bb5 c6 27 Bxc6 Kc7 28 Bxd7 Rxd7 29 Rb7+ Kxb7 30 Qxd7+ Kb6 31 Ra4 Black resigns**

Howell-McShane: Llandudno 2017 (diagram 2)

White has launched a complex sacrificial attack, but in regaining his material his light squares become fatally exposed. **21 Nxb4 Rxb4 22 Nxd7 Qxd7 23 Qxb4 Bb7 24 Qb6 Qxh3 25 Qd8+ Kg7 26 Bd4+ Kh6 27 Qf8+ Kh5 White resigns**

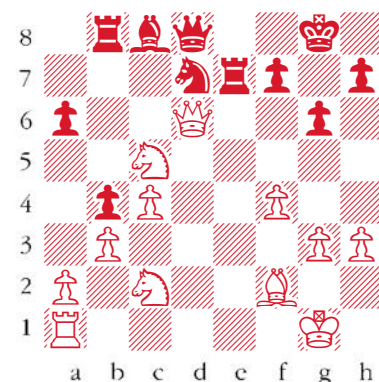
PUZZLE NO. 469

White to play. This is from Anand-Caruaena, St Louis 2017. Can you spot White's incredible winning move? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 15 August or via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk. There is a prize of £20 for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

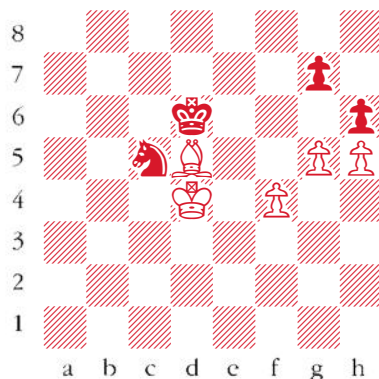
Last week's solution 1 ... Qxc3

Last week's winner Louis Busuttill, Mildenhall, Suffolk

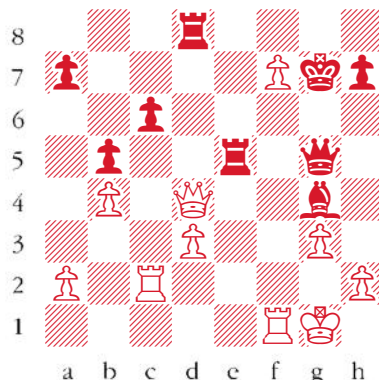
Diagram 2



Jones-Hanley: Llandudno 2017



46 f5 In this position Black resigned, for if 46 ... hxg5 47 f6 with inevitable coronation of a white pawn. Black's most resilient defence is 46 ... Nd7 47 f6 gxf6 48 gxh6 Nf8. Now not 49 Bg8 f5 50 h7 Nxh7 51 Bxh7 Ke6 and Black will draw as the bishop and 'wrong-coloured' rook's pawn are insufficient for the win once the black king can reach h8. Instead 49 Bb3 wins after the complex 49 ... f5 (49 ... Ke7 50 Ke4 wins easily) 50 Bg8!! (now Black is in zugzwang) 50 ... f4 51 Ke4 f3 and now the only winning move is 52 Kf4!! (52 Kxf3 Ke5 53 Kg4 Kf6 is a draw and 52 Kf5 Kc5 actually wins for Black) 52 ... f2 53 Bc4 Ke7 54 Kf5 and the white king will inevitably come to g7 when he is winning.



Competition

Monster mash-up

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3010, a nod to the late, great George Romero, you were invited to provide an extract from a mash-up of a literary classic of your choice and horror fiction.

Nathan Weston's *Werewolf Hall*, Brian Murdoch's *The Gruffalo in Transylvania*, Bill Greenwell's *Three Men and a Zombie* and Nicholas MacKinnon's *The Nightmare of Casterbridge* were all in with a shout for a place on the winners' podium. But in a hotly contested week they were squeezed out by the entries below, whose authors earn £25 each. Adrian Fry nabs the extra fiver.

Mr Septimus Harding, warden of Hiram's hospital, plunged his crucifix into the burning flesh of the ghoul, reflecting upon John Bold's contention that this role was excessively remunerative. Mr Harding conceded it might appear so to one unaware that the 12 bedsmen of the hospital were immortal demons whose fleshly manifestations must be battled nightly lest they escape, ravaging the innocents of Barchester. Nightly, with the regularity of nightmare, Mr Harding battled these monsters who, black of ichor and incontinent of entrails, regenerated and renewed their attack no matter into how many segments he bloodily diced them. However, such evidence being inadmissible by reason of obscenity, Mr Harding resolved to keep his counsel on what, in any case, was a spiritual matter. Besides, he would need all his power to combat the thing — all flapping grey skin, fangs and emptied eye sockets — lurching up at him from an adjacent bed.

Adrian Fry

Dixon pulled his Errol Flynn face, but no courage resulted. It was normal that Welch should ask to 'pick his brains' in the history library, and horrifyingly appropriate that he should prove to be a zombie. Dixon selected a heavy slab of sententiousness by ghastly Macaulay and lobbed it at Welch, knocking away one side of the medievalist's head. The remainder of Welch staggered, forgot what it was doing and wandered off. Just as Dixon was making strenuous, obscene gestures at the walking corpse's back, though, he felt something cold soak through his chaotic hair. This was nice, because his hangover was counter-attacking the five aspirins he had eaten for breakfast. He looked up. Margaret, drooling. On the ceiling, of course, and a vampire, of course. She dropped on to his shoulders, worryingly light but very strong, and dug her long nails into his neck. 'Chrissstine...!' she hissed...

Frank Upton

Decapitating one's Aunt is not a task that tends to incline one towards the chirpiest frame of mind. So when Jeeves shimmered in and I glanced up from the gore that had recently been Agatha, noting the disapprobation congealing about his features, I resolved to have none of it. 'If I may, Sir, a toast fork does not appear to be the most efficacious utensil for that task.' 'Dash it all, Jeeves! It's not as if a chap can divine the meal during which his next-of will enlist in the legion of the living dead or request she hang fire until he happens to have a steak knife to hand.' 'Quite so, Sir,' said Jeeves,

calmly offering his machete. 'Will this be all?' 'No,' I replied, raising my left arm so he could see where she'd nibbled off each of my fingers. 'I shall shortly require your superior brain, Jeeves.'

Frank Osen

The reader will readily admit that to be little by little disappointed in one's soul mate, not to say one's spouse, creates in the well instructed conscience a suspicion that one might oneself be in error, of having a false perspective if nothing worse. Thus Dorothea excused Casaubon's neglect of conventional hours and meals; he existed, after all, on a distant mountain top of visionary scholarship, a historic, not solely a temporal, personage. Yet his personality had waned. He seemed hardly to cast a reflection in the looking glass. Her core of feeling was perturbed by his remoteness, that she could not deny. It was therefore all the more a marvellous surprise and relief when, having inexplicably wandered into the graveyard at midnight *en déshabillée*, she found him passionately sinking his incisors into her lightly clad flesh, causing the fresh, warm blood to flow into his avid mouth.

G.M. Davis

At first I attached little significance to Gwinnett's observation that Pamela Widmerpool's performance in bed resembled that of a corpse, for such a characteristic could be understood as merely an extension of her generally glacial manner. I later revised this view when, in Venice for the Giorgione exhibition, I was woken at midnight by roars, increasingly discernible as expressions of protest, succeeded by cries for help. A moment later I encountered the blood-drenched figure of Widmerpool in the hotel corridor. Pamela, shrieking with laughter, repeatedly plunged a dagger, possibly Damascan, into his neck. The scene irresistibly suggested Caravaggio's depiction of Judith beheading Holofernes, an impression strengthened by her shroud-like garment and disordered hair. Here the resemblance ended, for her face, covered in glaucous slime, appeared to have undergone some unusual process of deliquescence, exposing areas of underlying bone. One became aware of a disagreeable odour of putrefaction.

Hugh King

He hurried back to his own house; and his mind was so busy on the way with the knife that he was getting ready for Eeyore that, when he suddenly saw Piglet sitting in his best armchair, he could only stand there rubbing his head and wondering whose life he was in.

'Hallo, Piglet,' he said. 'I thought you were dead.'

'No,' said Piglet, 'it's you who are dead, Pooh.'

'So it is,' said Pooh. 'I knew one of us was.'

He looked up at his clock, which stood forever at five minutes to midnight. 'Nearly midnight,' said Pooh happily. 'And then we'll go out, Piglet, and sing my song to Eeyore.'

'Which song, Pooh?'

'The one we're going to sing to Eeyore,' explained Pooh.

'Well,' said Eeyore, when he saw them walking up to his house, 'this is a surprise...'

A.H. Harker

NO. 3013: FLAVOUR OF THE MONTH

You are invited to submit a poem in praise or dispraise of the month of August. Please email entries of up to 16 lines to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 23 August.

Crossword 2322: In memoriam by Pabulum

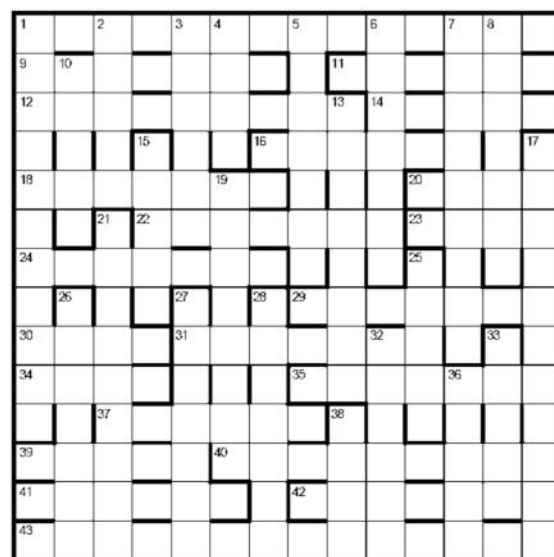
A pair of unclued lights (three words in total) give an event. Remaining unclued lights, including a pair (three words in total), each bring to mind the same relevant word in one of three different ways.

Across

- 1 Collectors trim and polish bits in disrepair (14)
- 9 Ape with recurrent depression in trap (7)
- 12 Dutch and Goan mice sick of interbreeding (9)
- 14 Souvenir of Long Island found in playing field (5)
- 16 Loos prince put up (6)
- 18 Most acerbic polemicist mad cop released (7)
- 20 Arab in row involving maiden (4)
- 22 Deed in English and small caps finalized by dandy (7)
- 23 Lass rejecting my delicious food (4)
- 24 Cleric clutches a chemical container (7)
- 30 Solitary herald cycling (4)
- 31 Parade beside compound in RAF station? (7)
- 34 Japanese creepers thrive in America (4)
- 35 Awful apathy stifles one philosophess (7)
- 37 Real Lactuca one canine leaves shredded (6)
- 40 South Island admits overlooking short young gents (9)
- 41 A load of tea and a load of milk child spilt? (6)
- 42 Liverpool suburb is not always in recession (7)
- 5 Passé type swindles DA and pageboy (7)
- 6 Trumpet uselessly in ghastly style (7)
- 7 Make awesome dish in love with myself! (9)
- 8 Lunatic teasing gypsy (7)
- 10 Scuttlebutt close to block in Banff (5, hyphenated)
- 13 Third of track collapsed in island transport system (8)
- 15 Element in heater (5)
- 17 Ticks and mites richest area poisoned (11)
- 21 Stinking stuff covers Clackmannanshire town raising an outcry (9)
- 26 Principality with occasional Scots (7)
- 27 Collage to stick in a higher place (7, hyphenated)
- 28 Decrees of king Scandinavians listened to (7)
- 32 Poem about present appeared dated (6)
- 33 Climber (French) in trouble climbing (5)
- 36 Soft Ghanaian Regius Professor (5)
- 38 Brainiac's bumps? (4)

Down

- 2 Kind master providing IT device (5)
- 4 Plants huge cases contained (4)



A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 28 August. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the *Chambers* dictionary instead of cash — ring the word 'dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2322, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name

Address

Email



SOLUTION TO 2319: POEM III

The poem was Shelley's 'Ozymandias'. The words from the poem are LEGS (16), TWO (17A), SANDS (26), NOTHING (37), KING (42), ANTIQUE (5), LAND (9), TRAVELLER (10), MET (23), DESPAIR (32). OZYMANDIAS (in the twelfth row) was to be shaded.

First prize P.J.W. Gregson, Amersham, Bucks

Runners-up Mrs P Bealby, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland; Mark Foreman, Sholing, Southampton

Status Anxiety

Don't like our diversity agenda? You're fired

Toby Young

Earlier this week, a technology website published an internal memo written by a Google employee called James Damore criticising the company's efforts to diversify its workforce. This is 'where angels fear to tread' territory. The American technology sector has come under fire for years for failing to hire and promote enough women and Google is being investigated by the US Department of Labor for allegedly underpaying its female employees. What makes this memo particularly controversial is that Damore takes Google to task for discriminating *in favour* of women.

He begins by saying that he is pro-diversity and accepts that sexism is one of the reasons women don't constitute 50 per cent of the workforce in the tech industry. But then he goes on to say that psychological differences between men and women are also a factor and that these differences are, in part, biologically based. For instance, he points out that women in general are more interested in people than things, which helps to explain why fewer women than men study computer science at university and apply for programming jobs. He also says that women in general value a good work-life balance, whereas men are more inclined to work long, anti-social hours to further their careers



'Google has created a politically correct monoculture that maintains its hold by shaming dissenters into silence'

— probably a more important reason than 'unconscious bias' when it comes to explaining why there aren't more women in leadership positions in tech. And he argues that, in light of these differences, positively discriminating in favour of women may end up harming Google at the expense of better-qualified, harder-working men.

Damore also laments the fact that it has become dangerous to challenge the progressive orthodoxy within Google. 'When it comes to diversity and inclusion, Google's left bias has created a politically correct monoculture that maintains its hold by shaming dissenters into silence,' he writes. 'This silence removes any checks against encroaching extremist and authoritarian policies.'

So how did Google react? It fired Damore for 'perpetuating gender stereotypes', thereby confirming his point. This was after his memo had provoked a tsunami of moral outrage across the liberal left. The *Guardian* reported the story on its front page under the headline 'Google apologises after employee's anti-diversity tirade' which was doubly misleading: Damore is pro-diversity and his carefully argued, 3,300-word memo is the opposite of a 'tirade'. In a similar vein, CNN referred to the memo as an 'anti-diversity manifesto' and Gizmodo, the website that published it in full, called it an 'anti-diversity screed'. As far as the liberal media is concerned, there is no such thing as a nuanced position when it comes to diversity and inclusion. You either embrace the progressive narrative about why there aren't more women in high-powered jobs; i.e. it is solely due to bias, or you're 'anti-diversity'.

Almost everyone who has condemned Damore misunderstood what he said. When he claims women in general have certain characteristics — such as a lower tolerance for high levels of anxiety — he is not saying that is true of *all* women. Rather, it is true of women *in aggregate*. To illustrate this distinction, take height. Saying American women are, on average, five inches shorter than American men is not to say all American women are shorter than American men.

This is a distinction Damore makes repeatedly, pointing out that it would be irrational to discriminate against individual women by assuming they possess these population-level characteristics. 'Many of these differences are small and there's significant overlap between men and women,' he writes. Indeed, when I first read the memo I thought Damore was guilty of belabouring this point. But he didn't belabour it enough, because 99 per cent of those who've condemned the memo ignore these careful caveats.

But the most striking thing about the reaction is the number of seemingly well-educated people who dismiss his points about population-level gender differences as wrong, when they are in fact commonplace; so uncontroversial as to be banal among biologists and evolutionary psychologists. As psychology professor Geoffrey Miller says, the memo's 'key claims about sex differences are well-supported by large volumes of research across species, cultures and history'.

No wonder progressives try to silence people like Damore. They are rightly concerned that their dogma cannot survive exposure to some elementary scientific truths.

MICHAEL HEATH



The Wiki Man

Sutherland's Law of Bad Maths

Rory Sutherland

Imagine for a moment a parallel universe in which shops had mostly not yet been invented, and that all commerce took place online.

This may seem like a fantastical notion, but it more or less describes rural America 100 years ago. In 1919 the catalogues produced by Sears, Roebuck & Company and Montgomery Ward were, for the 52 per cent of Americans who then lived in rural areas, the principal means of buying anything remotely exotic. In that year, Americans spent over \$500 million dollars on mail order purchases, half through the two Chicago companies. Yet in 1925, Sears opened its first bricks and mortar shop. By 1929, the pair had opened a further 800.

So Amazon's purchase of Whole Foods Market may be history repeating itself. Certainly we Brits have every right to feel smug about it since, by moving into physical retailing, Amazon seems to have spent several hundred billion dollars only to discover that Argos had it right all along.

A physical presence still counts.



Many models involving humans make the mistake of assuming that 10×1 is the same as 1×10

I could go on endlessly about the psychological factors at play here. But one element is what I call 'Sutherland's Law of Bad Maths'. This is the lazy assumption that 1×10 is the same as 10×1 . In pure maths, of course, they are the same: in reality, they very rarely are.

Let me explain. Online shopping is a very good way for ten people to buy one thing. It is not a good way for one person to buy ten things. Try and buy ten different things simultaneously online (as you may do before Christmas) and it all turns chaotic. The various items arrive on four separate days. Vans appear at your house at bizarre hours. And one delivery always fails, requiring you to drive to an industrial estate in Dartford on Christmas Eve, thus wiping out any putative time savings.

The great thing about Walmart, which investors tend to overlook, is that people turn up, buy 47 different things, and then transport them home at their own expense. Amazon can be a very big business selling one thing to 47 people, but if it can't sell 47 things to one person, there's a ceiling on how large it can be.

Nearly all mathematical models involving humans make the mistake of assuming that $10 \times 1 = 1 \times 10$.

Our tax system assumes that ten people who earn £70,000 for one year of their life should be taxed in the

same way as one person who earns £70,000 for ten consecutive years. Is this right? Yet I have never heard anyone question this. Bad maths again.

Recently I was involved in a discussion of train overcrowding. Again metrics do not distinguish between ten people who have to stand 10 per cent of the time and one person who has to stand 100 per cent of the time. But these aren't the same at all. If I am an occasional traveller and find myself standing once a month, well, meh. But if I had paid £3,000 for a season ticket and never got a seat, I would justifiably feel robbed.

Reframed this way, the problem becomes easier to solve. Run two trains in each direction every day which are exclusively for season ticket holders. Or give annual season ticket holders the sole right to sit in first class when standard is full (a practice already adopted by those thieving bastards from Bromley South, incidentally).

I should declare a non-interest here. I do not use a season ticket. But I would find both these arrangements perfectly equitable — just as I would expect someone who eats at a restaurant regularly to be offered a better table. Certainly it's a superior approach than Comrade Grayling's plan to get rid of first class altogether.

Rory Sutherland is vice-chairman of Ogilvy Group UK.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. I was brought up to stick rigidly to any invitation accepted and never to 'chuck' when a better one came along. Recently, therefore, when invited to lunch at Boisdale to meet my favourite actor on the same day as a long-standing invitation to lunch at White's with an old friend, I didn't chuck the first invitation for the 'better' (because unrepeatable) one. Later, I wondered if it is ever acceptable to play Invitation Trumps — to just be honest and say: 'I've had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity

to meet X on the same day as I'm meeting you. Would you mind if we postponed our lunch?' What is the protocol, Mary?
— Name and address withheld

A. *Invitation Trumps only works if the person being chucked is brimming with self-confidence. Such people are generally thrilled to be chucked at the last minute. They have more than enough demands on their time and would welcome a three-hour window opening up. Chippier people would take it badly, despite the lack of logic — and selfishness — in this. It could be a real blow to their self-esteem. As a general rule, unless the invitation issues from the top of the royal household, you should stick to your original commitment, but by all means let a third party reveal what you have passed over to honour it.*

Q. My gardener has imposed two straight lines of ghastly striped petunias, gifted from his own excess stocks, on the approach to our otherwise beautiful 15th-century country house. Creeping about by night with weed killer feels undignified, and that part of the garden has anti-rabbit fencing, so emulating a targeted leporine attack is also out. What should one do?
— M.R., Norfolk

A. *Knock up a schoolboy-style sneezing powder mixture using white pepper, black pepper and chili powder. Sprinkle a little on your hand, rub your nose, then stand by the petunias sneezing. Tell your gardener that it's absolutely extraordinary but you seem to be allergic to his fabulous flowers. Sadly, you must ask him to replant them in his own garden.*

Q. I'm going to stay on a Scottish sporting estate for a few days but can't think what to give my host, who already has everything he could possibly want. I don't want to arrive empty-handed, though. What do you suggest, Mary?
— M.B., Florence

A. *Order a copy of Birdsong (published 2012) by Jonathan Elphick, a compilation of text and photographs of 150 British and Irish birds, which comes with its own sound module to play examples of the various songs, cries, shrieks and beak drumming (as in woodpeckers) at the touch of a button. This would make an excellent house present for any sporting lodge, as it can be used for after-dinner games to see who can win the most points for identification. The book costs less than £20.*

Drink

The romantic king of clubs

Bruce Anderson



We were discussing romanticism, with me arguing that it should be confined to the boudoir, the bedroom, the library or the stage. When it escapes into public affairs, disaster often ensues. This led to us reminiscing about romantics we had known, and one of our number denounced the late John Aspinall, who, he said, would have liked to pass as a romantic but was really a society card-sharp. The animus was understandable. This chap would have been significantly richer if his great-uncle had never found his way to Aspers's gaming tables. Aspers led on to Jimmy Goldsmith, undoubtedly a romantic and charismatic figure, but a consistent political menace — and thus to Jimmy's nephew by marriage, Robin Birley.

He is a romantic figure, straight out of Byron's 'Don Juan'. When he was still a schoolboy he was nearly killed by a tiger at John Aspinall's zoo. Aspers believed in recycling the plunder from card-sharps into the preservation of rare animals. Heedless of risk, he liked to disport himself with

them and encouraged the zoo staff to do the same. That sometimes had consequences. The animals enjoyed the best of everything in the way of diet and could never have complained of hunger. This did not stop them having the odd chomp of keeper. Aspers's zoos were heavy on keepers.

One day, while Robin was in hospital recovering from the tiger's attentions — which needed several operations — a lawyer arrived at his bedside and started asking questions. Robin asked him what this was all about. 'Well, I'm gathering the details we'll need for the legal action against Mr Aspinall.' 'No you won't. There will be no action. What I did was my responsibility, not John Aspinall's.'

In one respect, Robin is very un-English. He is passionate about glamour, style, elegance. In an Englishman that would normally mean someone who danced at the wrong end of the ballroom: nothing like that about Robin. Glamour is in his lineage. His father Mark started Annabel's, while his grandfather Oswald was a good painter. He is often referred to as a society painter, but the stress should be on painter. Like James Gunn, he is currently under-

rated. Robin has already established one club, 5 Hertford Street, which has a chic reminiscent of Annabel's a generation ago, when it was known as Mabel's and seemed to be full of Guards officers and debutantes. These days it is being refurbished and its name will be broadcast in neon lights. That will disturb the nightingales in Berkeley Square.

Now he is expanding, with a new club in Albemarle Street to open in February, named Oswald's (the nickname will inevitably be Mosley's). Its main focus will be on wine. After a stiffish membership fee, patrons will be able to drink excellent bottles at retail prices, or bring their own with no corkage charge. If they have a case but only want to drink some of it, the club will sell the rest for them.

I was treated to the sort of bottles Oswald's might offer. We started with a Puligny-Montrachet Premier '13 Champs Canet from Domaine Jacques Carillon: excellent. Then the star, an '89 Léoville-Barton: a superb wine of first-growth quality. Thank goodness I was not asked to identify the year, because I would have confidently plumped for 2000. Then we drank a '90 St Emilion, from a property that is no longer producing wine: Château Magdelaine. It was outshone by the Léoville-Barton — but almost any other bottle would have been, too. In Oswald's, those clarets might sell for a little over £100 a bottle. These days, that is a bargain.

We finished off with a first-rate Calvados, the perfect accompaniment to a couple of cigars. Though the lunch may not have been a romantic experience, it was certainly a mellowing one.

A passion for glamour, style, elegance would normally mean someone who danced at the wrong end of the ballroom



MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Wuthering

Haworth is in a constant simmer of Brontë anniversary fever. It is looking forward to Emily Brontë's 200th birthday next year. (This year is poor old Branwell's.) I can't think of a book title more widely mispronounced than *Wuthering Heights*. Soft, effete southerners pronounce it with a short *u*. But the *wuthering* in the title is a good Yorkshire word and its first vowel must be pronounced like the vowel in *good*.

Yet if you look up *wuthering* in the big fat *Oxford English Dictionary*, you'll find it under *whither*, the main English form deriving from the Old English *hwitha*. Emily Brontë should



perhaps have called her novel *Whithering Heights*, though that would have led to more confusion among southerners who less often aspirate initial *wh*, and would have made *whithering* sound like *withering* (as in remarks).

The Anglo-Saxons had borrowed the word from the Norsemen, and it remained in use in Viking-struck parts of Britain: Northumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Cumberland, Westmorland and Yorkshire —

and Scotland, which employs a northern English dialect.

In his energetic Scots translation of the *Aeneid* from 1513, Gavin Douglas spelled *whither* as *quhiddier*. Towards the end of the poem, in the scene where Aeneas's spear flies through the air and goes through the thigh of Turnus, Douglas takes the image of a siege engine hurling a stone: 'Nevir sa swiftlie, quhiddierand the stane flew / Swakkit [hurled] from the ingyne unto the wall' as the spear flew. There, *quhiddierand* is something like 'whizzing'.

In modern Scotland the name *whitherspale* was given to a device, often used as a child's

toy, consisting of a notched slat of wood, attached to a string by which it is whirled round, producing a booming sound. In England this is called a *bullroarer* or *whizzer*. In England, *whithering* continued to bear a portfolio of everyday meanings: the noise of people lumbering up and down stairs, an outburst of laughter, the noise made by a hare starting from her den or the tremulous sensation of the proximity of a railway train. But none of this historical tangle of connotations is suggested in Kate Bush's Kentish voice declaring: 'I'm coming home to wuthering, wuthering, Wuthering Heights.' — Dot Wordsworth

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